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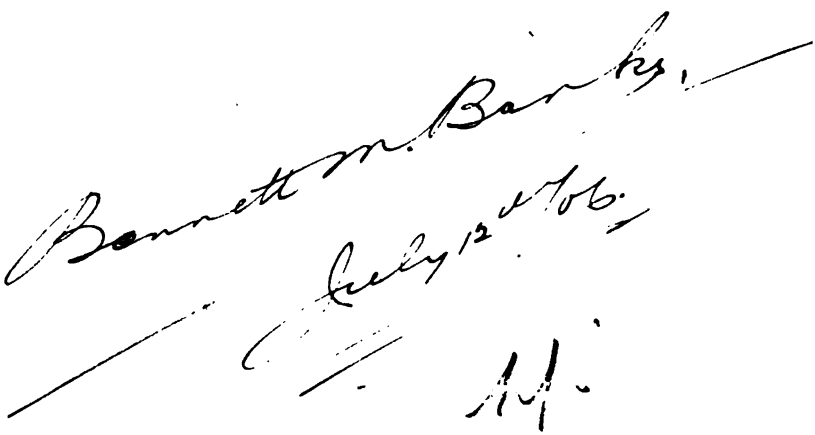

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CHRIS OF ALL-SORTS

CHAPTER I

THE "HUNTER'S MOON"

"The tyranny of the open night's too rough
For nature to endure."—*King Lear*, Act iii. Scene 4.

IT was laid to the charge of G. P. R. James, an historical novelist in some vogue about 1840, but now forgotten, that he affected as the opening scene of his romances the situation of two riders, the one aged and the other young, riding up a hill.

Lest the writer of the present story should be charged with plagiarism, he begs to inform the reader that the initiatory scene of his tale presents marked differences from that of G. P. R. James's novels.

He represents, indeed, two persons, but they are descending and not ascending a hill; moreover, both are young, and, what is not the case in G. P. R. James's stories, they are of different sexes.

Having made this statement, to prevent criticism, the story shall proceed from its start.

The time is that of the hunting season, in the month of November, when, as Hood sings, there is

> "No warmth, no cheerfulness, no healthful ease,
> No comfortable feel in any member—
> No shade, no shine, no butterflies, no bees,
> No fruits, no flow'rs, no leaves, no birds—
> No—vember."

But if there be none of these, there is, at all events, hunting. The scene is on the outskirts of Exmoor, and the *dramatis personæ* are Mr. Tom Bates, a young surgeon, who had lately entered into partnership in a practice in Barnford, and who had gone out with the hounds mainly for his own enjoyment, yet not without a view to the possibility of obtaining a job, should an accident in the field exact his professional services. The other person was Miss Christine Lavenham, who resided with her aunt in the town.

The accident which might have put Mr. Bates's surgical knowledge to the test had not taken place, but an accident of another sort had thrown these young people together—Mr. Tom Bates, new to the country, had lost his way, having become separated from the field; and precisely the same thing had taken

place with Miss Christine Lavenham. And as two bits of straw adrift on a pool insensibly gravitate together, so had it been with these errant young people on the confines of Exmoor.

And this was precisely the sort of accident which neither particularly desired.

Miss Christine Lavenham was, as already intimated, residing with her aunt, Lady Laura Demant, at Barnford, and was now riding a horse that had been lent her for the occasion by a friend, Colonel McGuire. She had been separated from the field by not wishing to press her steed too much, and then had lost her way in one of the many tangles of lanes that abound in the country, where between high hedges one can see little of the land, and by serpentine twists one speedily loses all sense of direction.

Cottages were sparse, and when she had inquired her way of a yokel, the response had been made in a dialect so unintelligible, and the directions given had been so diffuse, that she had received no assistance from the information solicited and readily given. Moreover, the idea began to mature in her mind that recently she had been wrongly directed by a woman who either did not know the right hand from the left, or who, in giving instructions as to how to turn, had been unable to

place herself in imagination in the position of her interlocutrix. What led her to surmise this was, that where a man bade her take the first turn to the left the next woman would assure her that she must take the exactly opposite direction.

She might have guided herself with tolerable correctness by the expiring light of day, had she been aware at what particular point of the compass the sun set on November 15th.

But possessing only the rudimentary knowledge that the sun sets in the west, she bore away far too much in a northerly direction, and not one leading to the town where her aunt would be expecting her home to dinner.

Moreover, her hunter manifested unequivocal signs of being tired out. Neither whip nor word availed to stimulate him to quicken his pace, and his dejected head and occasional stumbles obliged her to be on the alert, and keep a firm hand on the rein, lest he should go down on his knees.

Great was her relief, accordingly, when from a side lane issued a gentleman who she perceived had been in the hunt, and who she trusted would be able to tell her which was the way to Barnford.

Her disappointment was correspondingly great when, in answer to her queries, he let

her understand that he was in the same predicament as herself.

"All I know is," said he, "that we must bear away to the south."

"Yes; but where is the south?"

"Yonder." He pointed with his hunting crop.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Miss Lavenham. "Where are we now?"

Christine had been riding along by the side of Mr. Bates for some minutes, and now arrived at a point where the lane, or parish road, dipped suddenly into what seemed to be a gulf of absolute darkness. Before them was the wan halo of sunset shining in a belt under a canopy of inky cloud, and this light revealed a lofty ridge, apparently of moorland, dotted with clumps of thorn, or, it might be, only of gorse, standing out sharply against the topaz sky. But all below was as mysterious in its depth and gloom as if she had been looking into a well; nay, more so, for the water in a well does respond to the illumined sky overhead, whereas here was no reflection.

"What is to be done?" she asked in dismay.

"But one thing can be done," replied the surgeon, "we must dip into this inkpot."

"Yes, I suppose so; but that means climb-

ing that mountainous ridge opposite, and my horse cannot do it."

"We must make the attempt."

"But have you not inquired the distance to Barnford?"

"The rustic mind is incapable of judging distances. I have received the most contradictory statements on that head. All I can gather from them is that we are a long way off."

"My horse is done up. What do you mean by a long way off?"

"Something between ten or twenty miles. Halve what has been told me, and say fifteen."

"Fifteen miles! and night falling on us, and we plunging into this sea of darkness."

"I am much afraid," said Mr. Tom Bates, "that my brute is falling lame. However, we must push on. Stay! I saw a light in the depth."

"I shall dismount," said Miss Lavenham; "this is like going down the steep roof of a church, and with the additional difficulty of loose stones sprinkled over it."

"Much better remain in the saddle. Hold a tight rein."

"No, my beast will not bear me; he will tread on one of those stones, go down, and roll. He has been stumbling on level ground every third minute. I will throw my reins over the

pommel and let him pick his own way down. He can see the obstructions better than I can."

Tom Bates was out of his saddle in a moment, and assisted Miss Lavenham to dismount.

Then he remounted.

"I feel safer thus," he explained.

He rode, she walked, holding up the skirt of her habit. She was silent. Presently the surgeon heard a gulp, and was convinced that the girl was sobbing. He refrained from making a remark. There was occasion for discouragement. She was herself almost as tired as was the horse. She found herself in a most awkward predicament—perhaps fifteen miles from the town, and satisfied that her steed could not carry her so far. And to add to the difficulty, black night was settling in. She was in the company of a gentleman whose name she did not know, of whose character and condition she was ignorant. A situation assuredly enough to take the heart out of any girl.

Presently she controlled herself, and put a leading question—

"You are bound for Barnford, you live there?"

"Yes, I am a surgeon in practice there."

"I feel that it is not possible for me to go the

whole way. If we reach a cottage or an inn I will ask to be taken in for the night. You will, I am sure, be so good as to ride on, let my aunt, Lady Laura Demant, know where I am and what has delayed me."

"Certainly, if possible."

"Fifteen miles!" sighed Christine; "I wish I had not come out to-day."

"Throw away empty shells when you have eaten the nuts. Wishes are useless. Halloo there!"

His mare had stopped. It was shivering.

"By Jove! she is utterly done up," he said. "She got into a bog on the moor, and was a bit strained in pulling herself out. I must get down now."

He left his saddle, and stood by the horse, patting and encouraging it. Some minutes elapsed, however, before the mare could be induced to proceed. Christine's horse had also halted, and—it was a bad sign—made no attempt to crop the grass in the hedge.

"Come along," said Mr. Bates, "we must get to the light I saw winking at me."

His thoughts were not more cheerful than those of the girl. He was, as he said to himself, in a confoundedly awkward predicament—by accident constituted guardian, to a young lady a long way from her home, and it was

pretty obvious that she could not proceed much farther that night.

"Hurrah!" said he, as lights flashed on him at a bend of the road; "by all that is blessed I do believe—an inn."

Both horses seemed to recognise that relief was near, and quickened their paces. In the darkness a long low house could be discerned, with a sign-board hanging over the door. Three windows were illumined. As far as could be discovered in the darkness there was a verandah before the house.

Mr. Tom Bates went at once to the door, opened it, and stamped on the slated floor in the passage. Then a decent elderly woman came forth from the back premises.

"I say," said Mr. Bates, "is this an inn?"

"Well—sir—a hotel."

"A hotel, is it? Well, look here, there is a lady outside who has been hunting all day, and she and her mount are quite fagged out. Will you be so good as to take her in for the night? Give her a good supper, and everything needed to make her comfortable. I must leave my horse here. Have you one I can ride on to Barnford?"

"I am very sorry, sir, but we do not keep horses. As to the lady, I will do my best for her."

"No horses! How far do you call it to Barnford?"

"Sixteen and a half miles."

"Bless my soul! But here, Miss—excuse me, I do not know your name—will you step inside? The landlady will do everything that is hospitable and kind for you. I'll see about getting another horse for myself."

"I don't exactly know where you will get one, sir," said the landlady. "The nearest farm is that of Mr. Tooke, and he is that crabbed, that he will not let or lend. And at Farmer Pencross's the young men have been out hunting to-day, and their horses are not likely to be fit for anything else."

"Then I must walk it," said Bates.

"It's a middlin' long stretch. I suppose you know the way?"

"No, I do not. But I can follow my nose."

"That rather depends on the sort of nose you've got, or on your ability to see it in the dark. You'll excuse me, sir, but you are as lief to go wrong as right in such a night as is setting in. You will find all along cross roads, and by night you can't see the direction posts—more by token they won't help you, for some mischievous urchins have gone and turned one round to point wrong ways."

"Then I must take a guide."

"I am very sorry, but I don't know where one is to be got, sir. You see, there is no village here, only just this house which gentlefolks patronise in the summer, and for fishers, and there's none here but myself and daughters and a boy."

"Well, the boy will do."

"But then, sir, who is to look after the horses?"

Mr. Bates stamped.

"Hang it—confound it all! What's the name of this house?"

"The 'Hunter's Moon,' sir. I thought every gent knew that—it's very popular, sir, the ''Unter's Moon.'"

CHAPTER II

THE BABES IN THE WOOD

"Open your ears: for which of you will stop
The vent of hearing, when loud Rumour speaks."
Henry IV., Second Part, Int.

MISS LAVENHAM was kindly entertained by the landlady and her daughters. They put themselves to considerable inconvenience to make her rest in the inn comfortable. That was not the time of year when they expected visitors, at all events to stay the night, so that mattresses and the rest of the bedding had to be brought down to the kitchen to be well aired, at the same time that in and out between pillows, bolsters, and blankets the mother had to thread her way to cook the meal for which the two hunters were craving. The younger girl insisted on lending Christine one of her dresses, that with adaptation, by means of safety pins, was made to fit her passably. It was a relief to Christine to be rid of the heavy riding habit that was besplashed with mud, and to wash and to dress her hair in a pretty, clean

bedroom, into which she had been shown, and where at once one of the girls lighted a fire.

When she came downstairs she was in better spirits. She found the table already spread in the dining-room; it sparkled with glass and plate, and a bunch of chrysanthemums stood in the middle in a celery vase.

A laughing wood fire crackled and fizzed on the hearth backed up with some slabs of peat. It was evident to Christine that the "hotel" was a resort of people of good class, who expected to be well and comfortably catered for, and that the landlady knew perfectly how to meet their requirements. No commercial travellers came that way; no farmers stopped there on the road to or from market to pile another glass of whisky on top of the ale and rum and cider lodged within; no drivers halted there, leaving their cattle outside whilst they soaked and swore and wrangled in the bar; no labourers spent their evenings in its kitchen, smoking and discussing the last murder and Church government till turned out by the policeman. It was simply a house to which came the artist, the tourist, and the fisherman in their seasons, and their season was not November.

Books were on the side table and in a swinging case against the wall, novels left by visitors

during the summer, which when once read are cast aside, as the artisan throws away the paper that contained his shag when he has transformed all its contents to smoke and ash.

On the mantelshelf were photo groups, which one of the daughters pointed out as likenesses of visitors from London who came to the "Hunter's Moon" summer after summer. She indicated paintings on the shutters done by artists who had lodged there studying the pretty surroundings, and transferring the golden sunset, the moors flushed with heather, the kingfisher's haunt by the brook to their canvases.

The visitors' book was produced, and this, although not interesting to Miss Lavenham, she was constrained to look through, and was required to read the laudatory comments passed on the cooking of the hostess and the charms of her comely daughters. The damsel who exhibited the book drew particular attention to a rapturous poetic effusion by, as she said, an Oxford gentleman, whose portrait stood on the mantelpiece, and also framed against the wall, and Chris suspected that there was a little romantic affection on one side or the other that would flicker as summer lightning and end in naught, not the satisfactory naught which is a ring of gold.

Presently dinner was served—a roast fowl

with bread sauce and about it dainty curls of bacon.

At the same time Mr. Tom Bates entered.

"I am so sorry," said he, "I cannot do your errand to Barnford to-night. The stars in their courses fight against me. It is as our good hostess said—no spare horse to be had, and no man or boy willing to walk with me the sixteen miles to-night as guide. All are too tired with their work to-day, or have their duties to perform to-morrow. Bed, board, and five bob were no inducements. 'Pon my word, the labouring class here cannot be so badly off; in the East of England I could have a score to accompany me for such an offer. Or is it that the climate makes them inert? I have been to all the farms, and in vain. Then I thought of the parsonage. It seems that there is a little church on the hillside, but there is no rectory or vicarage. The parish is so small, numbering under a hundred, and the living goes with another some four or five miles away. So, there is no help for it. I must stay here for the night, but I will run over to the next telegraph office to-morrow morning and wire to Lady Laura Demant. By the time I reached it this evening it would be shut. So circumstances are such that I can do no other."

Chris thanked the young surgeon, but she

did not feel easy. She must dine with him *tête-à-tête* in a lone inn, in a strange part of the country—but, as he said, there was no help for it.

"The horses are utterly fagged," he added, "and will not touch their oats. Mine has gone lame."

During the meal Christine felt constrained, but the constraint wore off before the geniality and frankness of the young surgeon. He insisted on her taking a glass of hot sherry and water before retiring for the night, and she assured him that tobacco smoke was not distasteful to her, and begged him to smoke his pipe in the dining-room so soon as the supper was over, and not to retire for the purpose to the kitchen or the verandah.

But for the extreme awkwardness of the situation, the evening would have been pleasant to Chris, for the young fellow had plenty of conversation and could be amusing. He showed much delicacy of feeling, and was not in the smallest degree presuming.

When she was in bed, Christine did not readily go to sleep. She was racked with anxiety on account of the concern in which her aunt would be at her non-appearance. That aunt was a fidgety and exacting person, and would not bear her absence with equanimity,

trusting that all would be right. Moreover, her position was by no means one that was pleasing to contemplate, and might, if it became known, provoke ill-natured comments. That it would be known was inevitable, for she was riding a borrowed horse, so that not only would Lady Laura Demant be making inquiries about her, but so would also Colonel McGuire.

Towards morning she lost consciousness, and did not awake till late, but was then refreshed.

When she descended to the parlour, breakfast was laid, and Tom Bates was awaiting her. He had been up about an hour and a half, and had despatched the youth, who attended on the horses and cleaned the boots and knives, to the telegraph station, whilst he himself looked after the hunters.

"I am sorry to tell you," said he, "that our steeds cannot start yet. Remember we have sixteen miles before us, and the poor brutes are not sufficiently recovered. Yours is only now beginning to peck at his oats. He would not touch the bran last night. We shall have to ride slowly. My beast is very stiff and lame."

"What a lovely morning!" observed Chris. "It is like a spring day, with the sun even warm, as it shines into the room."

"Yes," said Bates; "in winter we have foregleams of the coming spring. Death is

life's renewal. The leaf only falls when thrust off by the young bud."

When they had breakfasted—

"I shall go outside into the verandah and smoke a pipe," said he, "and kill time till the horses can start, and that will be after the return of the boy from the post office."

"If you will allow me, I will join you with one of these books, and enjoy the fresh air."

So they planted themselves on garden seats outside.

The air was soft, but the savour of death was in it, from the fallen leaves and the decaying vegetation. The sun played on the banks, green with moss, but shot with crimson where touched with frost and white where the sap of life had gone. It sparkled on the tears that dripped from every spray, for the hillside oozed with water that formed springs and rills, splashing among the foliage and over rocks on their way to the rushing stream in the valley bottom. The nook was so sheltered that some China roses were still in flower on the house. The hillsides were clothed in woods, the oak had not lost its russet leaves, the beech was golden, and a few elms were still hung with green. Here and there sombre pines shot above the deciduous trees like patches of rich dark velvet pile.

"This is a pretty spot, even now," said Miss

Lavenham, "and must be quite charming in summer."

"It is like the face of an old lady," observed Bates. "One looks at it and dreams of what it must have been when young and fresh."

"No wonder artists haunt this inn."

"And fishermen. If you had seen, as I have, the pools in the river, your fingers would be twitching for the rod."

Scarcely had they seated themselves before a horseman appeared on the road in scarlet coat, the tails purple, and wearing a black hat that sat on the back of his head.

As he approached, he eyed the couple in the verandah, drew up, and setting the handle of his crop against his thigh, burst out laughing.

Then he spurred on again, and as he came to the door of the inn, shouted to the hostess for a whisky and soda.

Bates rose from his seat, and went to his side, and said—

"I suppose that you, like myself, could not get back last night. My horse fell lame."

"Nor the young lady," said the huntsman. "Hang it—I had not your luck."

He laughed again.

He was a tall man, with thin underlip, florid cheeks, his eyes a watery blue under very light lashes and brows, and had a perpetual stare in

them. When he had drained his glass and discharged his debt, he said to the hostess, loud enough to be heard by Bates and Miss Lavenham, "I say—I say, Mrs. Fry. You must change the name of your hotel from the 'Hunter's Moon' to the 'Honey Moon.' Do you take? Hey?" And rode away laughing.

Chris turned her head aside, feeling the blood mount to her temples. Presently, after having pretended to read a chapter of her book, she inquired, "Who may that objectionable person be? I have seen him about in Barnford, but have never met him."

"He! a Mr. Paste, a man of means, keeps a good stable, not very bright in his upper parts. If he had taken off his hat you would have noticed how his bald head is flattened at the top. A man who considers himself to be a wag, but all whose wit consists in insolence."

"When can we start? I am impatient to be off."

"I will go round to the stables and see."

When, finally, the horses were brought to the door, the last injunction given by the landlady was that they were to beware of being misled by the signpost which had been turned about by mischievous boys.

Christine and the surgeon did not mount at the door, as the ascent was very steep on the

way they had to take, and they desired to spare their horses to the utmost. But on reaching the summit they took to their saddles, and urged their beasts over the moor before them at a trot. It was, however, evident that the brutes were too stiff to be able to keep up the pace. About half-way to Barnford they passed through a village, and outside a public-house saw the huntsman who had gone by in the morning.

He saluted them boisterously. "Halloo! I say! I've been having a snack. Come and do the same. Rasher and eggs very good. No!—well, I'll join you presently, and we will ride on together."

"We cannot wait; our horses are stiff and slow," said the surgeon.

"I'll catch you up! I say—I'll be after you in a trice."

They proceeded on their way.

"I hope he will not join company with us," said Chris. "The man is odious."

"I hear the clatter of his horse-hoofs behind," observed the surgeon, after they had ridden a mile and a half.

"Oh, do let us get out of his way!" exclaimed Chris, looking about her. "There —there is a bye-lane; let us give him the slip."

Bates agreed, and trusting that they were

unobserved, they deflected to the right, through a lane thickly overgrown.

But as Mr. Paste arrived at the branch, he drew up, and putting his hands to his mouth, bellowed down the lane: "The Babes in the Wood! Poor dears! Two is company, three none!" and he trotted on.

A few minutes later, as she and Mr. Bates rode forward, Chris said, "I fear we have made a mistake. It was my fault. We have converted that man into an enemy. It would have been wiser every way to have endured his society."

Not till in the afternoon did the two riders reach the suburbs of Barnford. As they entered the long street, where the town straggles out to meet the country, and devour its beauty and taint its simplicity, Christine quickly perceived that she and her companion were objects of notice. Women, so soon as they appeared, nudged each other and made remarks. Some men, leaning against a hoarding, with pipes in their mouths, removed them to say something and laugh. Her face was on fire with annoyance. Obviously the whole town had been made aware that she had not returned with the hunters on the previous evening. In a small town a little incident swells to large proportions. Tickle one member, and the whole

community laughs. Prick one, and the whole laughs again because the one has been hurt. The breath of a scandal whips the whole social surface into foam.

All Barnford was aware that Miss Lavenham had not returned on the previous evening. Lady Laura had been too greatly alarmed to keep her fears to herself; she had sent in all directions, inquired of every hunter in the place whether she had been seen, and if so, when and where. Riders had been despatched along the several roads leading to Exmoor to make inquiries.

Colonel McGuire had been concerned about his horse, and he also had run about questioning.

Doctor Square had been called out, and his partner had not been available in a case of emergency, so it became known that Mr. Tom Bates was likewise absent. Conjecture was rife. Rumours were in circulation. Someone started the report that Colonel McGuire's horse had been spiked, and had been shot to put it out of its misery. Mr. Bates had ridden into a bog and had been engulfed. Miss Lavenham had had a bad fall in leaping a hedge, and had broken her neck.

But the worst was in store for Christine.

As she and the surgeon rode past the princi-

pal inn in the place, a window of the billiard-room was thrown open, and Mr. Paste appeared in it, along with several gentlemen who had been playing, and who held their cues in their hands, all looking out with interest; and among the faces was that of one whom she particularly regretted should be among them, and she fancied she could hear Mr. Paste exclaim, as he pointed to her and her attendant, "Ha! ha! The Babes in the Wood! The Babes in the Wood!"

CHAPTER III

LADY LAURA

"1ST LORD. As we are ourselves, what things are we!
2ND LORD. Merely our own traitors."
All's Well that Ends Well, Act iv. Scene 3.

"WELL, Chris!" exclaimed Lady Laura Demant, "so here you are at last. What has happened?"

"I was benighted, aunt, and my horse tired out."

"Dear, dear! And all alone?"

"No, aunt, I was not alone."

"Not alone! Good gracious! Who was with you?"

"Mr. Bates, the surgeon. He kindly assisted me."

"When?"

"Yesterday."

"And since then?"

"He has taken care of me since. He has been very good and considerate."

"But where did you stay?"

"At the 'Hunter's Moon,' a very nice little inn."

"Good gracious me! And Mr. Bates also?"

"Yes, aunt."

"How vexatious! It would have been far better if you had met with an accident."

"What—broken my neck?"

"No, not exactly that, but a collar-bone. It would have served as an excuse. Now it will be the talk of the town. Surely you did not ride into Barnford along with Mr. Bates?"

"Yes, I did, Aunt Laura."

"And with no one else?"

"No."

"Goodness! What a catastrophe! What will Captain Fenton say to this? He was here two or three times yesterday evening, and again this morning, inquiring about you."

"I saw him at the billiard-room window as I passed."

"Dear, dear! What a misfortune! This has been a dreadful hunt, a most unfortunate day."

"I assure you, aunt, we had the best run of the season."

"I do not mean that. I mean this happening to you. It should not have occurred."

"It was an accident."

"But accidents should not be allowed to happen. I mean accidents of this sort."

"I lost my way. I did not know the country."

"You should have taken a map with you."

"Much good that would have been in the dark!"

"You should have been back before dark."

"I did not make the days short in November."

"If Captain Fenton had been with you it would not so much have mattered—but this whipper-snapper of a surgeon!"

"I am awfully sorry, but it has happened, and there is an end of the matter."

"But that is not the end of the matter. Why did you not throw the horse down and break its knees, that would have explained everything."

"But the horse was lent. It belongs to Colonel McGuire."

"Never mind. You ought to have done it to furnish a palpable excuse for your not coming back to Barnford last night. Everyone would have seen the state the horse was in, and so your absence would have explained itself."

"I could not do it."

"You were morally bound to consider the probable consequences, and provide against

them. Captain Fenton has not been here yet, as he ought to have been, to make inquiries, as he saw you ride in. You have him on a string, and you cannot afford to draw the string across barbed wire, with the chance of cutting it, and losing him. You must think of his prospects of a title and a large fortune."

"Oh, aunt! I do not want Roger for his title and fortune."

"Then, for what on earth do you want him?"

"Because I like him, I more than like him. I am very fond of him for his own sake. He is an excellent man, but I am not blind to his faults."

"You talk like a green girl. Of course it is his position and wealth that make him a desirable *parti*, and I would never have favoured the engagement but for that consideration."

Lady Laura was the daughter of the Earl of Tullymore. The title was Irish, but the family was English.

She had been married to Colonel Demant, who was dead, and she had no children. Lady Laura was fairly comfortably off, but she had only a pension, and a lien on the estates of the earldom in Ireland; and, owing to the reduction in rents by the Land Courts, and the difficulty in getting in the reduced rents, she

did not always obtain her annuity regularly and in full. Her niece was the daughter of a Mr. Lavenham, who had been a merchant, supposed to be wealthy, but who had failed; whether he had died, crushed by his losses, or had hastened his exit from the world, was never clearly known. His widow, Lady Lavinia, moped, fretted rather over the loss of her comforts than over the decease of her husband, and died as well, when Christine was aged twenty, and the girl was left to her aunts, the Ladies Laura Demant and Barbara Fitzwarden, the latter of whom was not married and was considerably the elder of the two. Christine saw little or nothing of her uncle, the Earl, who did not bear a high character, was a man very much made up by his valet, his barber, and his tailor, was impecunious, and lived mainly in Paris and at Monte Carlo. Christine had a hundred and fifty pounds per annum, that remained out of the wreck of her father's fortune. Left early an orphan by his death, and with a feeble, complaining, and selfish mother, she had acquired strength of character in adversity. She was intelligent, frank, and sincere. She was a fine girl, now aged three-and-twenty, though this is between ourselves, as the Peerage usually does not record the ages of the ladies who find a place in it. She

was firmly built, not beautiful, but with fine dark eyes and hair, and a pale olive complexion.

Lady Laura was a shrewd, worldly woman, with a hard eye that repelled those whom she did not think it worth her while to conciliate, and which would not soften to those whom she endeavoured to allure. For its deficiencies she made up on such occasions with a smile and a compliment. She was selfish, and would have been designing, had there been anything for which to scheme. She found that her means were insufficient to enable her to move in society to which, in town, her rank entitled her. Consequently she had settled in a small Devonshire town, where she could be at the top of such provincial society as there existed.

She made Christine contribute a hundred a year to the household expenses, and allowed her to keep the fifty that remained for her dress, and with which to play. On her death, her niece would obtain nothing from her, for the pension and annuity would expire along with herself.

Of Lady Barbara Fitzwarden Christine saw very little. Christine's hundred pounds was of sufficient consideration to Lady Laura for her desire to keep her niece with her, and Lady Barbara did not care to encumber herself with

a girl. A week before Christmas she sent her niece a pictorial card, and expected in return a turkey from the country for her dinner on that festal day.

"Do not forget, Chris, to forward a ham and some cream to Aunt Babs," was the occasional reminder of Lady Laura; "she is worth cultivating. She has some fine family jewels—happily, for if Tullymore could have laid his hands on them, they would have been got rid of long ago."

And Christine sent the ham and cream, paying for them out of the little sum allowed her, and that was over from what she expended on her dress. Lady Laura put upon her niece all domestic responsibilities, and worked her like a housekeeper. The office was no sinecure, for the lady was close about money, and exacting with servants. Christine had to calm down many a ruffle caused by Lady Laura's caprice and tyranny. The lady spoke sharply to her domestics, could not understand that they ever needed relaxation, was prone to imagine a lapse in deference, or a neglect of duty, where nothing of the kind really existed; and she would give a servant her discharge in a fit of unprovoked ill-humour. When this took place, it devolved on Christine to find a substitute, and in these days it is not an easy matter to

obtain, on the spur of the moment, an obsequious, active, and competent slave.

When her niece became engaged to Captain Fenton, Lady Laura was highly gratified. He was heir to a baronetcy, and to a fine place, Fenton Court, in Sussex, and to good estates, bringing in, it was surmised, ten thousand a year. Roger Fenton had, moreover, house property of his own, derived from his mother, in London, which, if not in the best and most fashionable parts, was still house property in the metropolis, and kept him in comfort as a bachelor.

Under these circumstances the engagement was all that could be desired. Lady Laura confidently proposed, when the marriage took place, and Roger Fenton entered on his inheritance, transferring herself from Devon to Sussex, disposing of or letting Longridge House, and making Fenton Court her home. As she said to herself, "I have encumbered myself with this raw girl for three years. It will be her turn then to make me comfortable." And in a stately country mansion she would be able to take her place and rule the fashion in the first rank of Sussex county society. "Love in a cottage," said Lady Laura, "is all stuff and nonsense. You are not called to endure such a state of things. Your hundred and fifty

is a bait to allure none but a curate who feeds on chops and mashed potatoes. It is the greatest piece of good luck that you have received an offer from Roger Fenton, and you ought to be eternally grateful to me for negotiating it.

"Why, good gracious me! There must be immense accumulations. Old Sir John has lived the life of a hermit. He is a religious monomaniac. He has spent nothing in storing his cellar, he has kept no hounds, has never hunted, has neglected his gardens, has not preserved the shooting, has not dreamed of such an iniquity as giving a ball. He has seen none save a stray revivalist or a wandering evangelist, and those people eat, but do not drink, except on the sly. He cannot spend a thousand pounds in the year. You are a fortunate girl, my dear Christine, and I take great credit to myself for its contrivance."

Chris smiled. She was not aware that her aunt in reality had any hand in the engagement.

"I am of your opinion, Chris," said Lady Laura; "Captain Fenton ought to have gone to his uncle, notwithstanding their disagreement. Goodness knows who is in the house now, whilst he is ill. Suppose that he were to die, what check is there on servants, mission-

aries, revivalists, laying their hands on whatever they may fancy, and which they think may serve their purpose? There ought to be someone on the spot to keep an eye on these gentry, and to take stock of his possessions."

"It is so sad," said Chris, "to think of the old man dying without a relation near him."

"Oh, as to that, as he made his bed, so must he lie! I consider Roger and his interests, and yours, Chris. It would be very distressing to find that light fingers had made away with some valuable pieces of porcelain."

"Roger could not force himself on Sir John, when his uncle declined to see him. It does not seem fair on a man to take advantage of him when he is too ill to resist intrusion."

"Bah! everything comes to Roger. He must look after his own interests. What o'clock is it now, Chris?"

"Ten."

"And Roger has not been here this evening to inquire after you. I greatly fear the consequences of the ill-advised hunt. Mind you, I am not to blame if things go across. It will be due to yourself alone. I have done everything in my power for you."

CHAPTER IV

A LOVERS' QUARREL

"We that are true lovers run into strange capers."
As You Like It, Act ii. Scene 4.

ALTHOUGH Chris had pretended before her aunt to treat lightly the failure of Captain Fenton to call that evening to see her, and hear of her adventure, his non-appearance made her uneasy.

He had inquired thrice the previous evening, and once that morning, but when he knew by the evidence of his own eyes that she was back, he surely ought at once to have hastened to Longridge House to see her. He had not done so, the evening had passed, and he had not put in an appearance. This was ominous. He was wont to be a most attentive swain. Why this sudden coolness in his observance?

When she had retired to her own room, she sat by the fire thinking. What we look at through the right end of the telescope during the day, we search through the wrong end at night. What is seen distinctly in the daylight

in diminished proportions is seen vague but extravagantly magnified at night. She rehearsed what she had recently undergone, the rude remarks of Mr. Paste, his insulting laughter—the entry into Barnford, and the looks cast at her by those she passed, the expression of the faces of the gentlemen crowded at the billiard-room window to watch her. Added to this was the unpleasant consciousness that her aunt heard all the tittle-tattle of the town, was in telephonic communication with its every part, through her lady's-maid. She had exhibited herself a little querulous with Lady Laura that evening. She had hardly slept the previous night, and she slept still less this night, with the consequence that, when she rose, her nerves were fretted and she was further predisposed to be irritable. And surely the events of the past forty-eight hours had been sufficient to try the nerves and prove the temper of any ordinary girl with self-respect.

A girl of no fine feeling and with considerable self-assurance would alone have gone through it and come out unscathed.

The two ladies had just finished breakfast, Lady Laura was by the fire with her feet on the fender, reading the paper. Christine was collecting her letters with the intention of proceeding to her room to answer them, and had

put together some bills her aunt had thrown to her with the request that she would see to them, when Captain Fenton was announced.

He came in, bowed, and said, "I must apologise for so early a call, but I shall have to leave Barnford almost immediately—that is to say, by the next express for town. I have had a telegram to the effect that my uncle is dead."

"Dear, dear! I must congratulate you," said Lady Laura, and then hastily correcting herself, said, "I mean, it is so sad and awful. Poor old man! I am, however, convinced that he is now in his proper element, much more than he was when at Fenton Court, the game not preserved, no parties. A man in his position should not have adopted fantastic religious ideas. I think you told me yourself, Sir Roger, that he had formed and founded a church of his own, to which only himself and his housekeeper and the kitchen-maid belonged. So now you are Sir Roger."

"I suppose so."

"There is no supposition in the case," said Lady Laura. "Of course you are. You were the undoubted heir to the baronetcy."

"Yes, there can be no doubt about that. But look at the telegram. It is from the rector of Fenton; he was an old school acquaintance, and has done me real service by writing to me

occasionally and telling me how matters went at the Court. It is oddly expressed, is it not?"

He handed the pink paper to the lady. She read the message aloud. "Sir John died yesterday afternoon. Did not know till too late to wire. Come at once, and mind bring own solicitor.—Hindley."

"It is a strange telegram, is it not? Why should I bring my *own* lawyer? There are the solicitors who managed my uncle's affairs. And how was it that Sir John died in the afternoon, and Hindley, the parson of the parish, knew nothing of it till after eight o'clock at night, when the telegraph office closed?"

"My dear Sir Roger," said Lady Laura, "as to the rector not being informed, I think nothing of that. Your uncle had founded his own church, and was probably ministered to by his kitchenmaid. With regard to the lawyers—there is no knowing how the vultures about him may have been preying on him before he was dead, and probably your friend advises you that you should have someone with you who can counsel you how to deal with these birds. Take one by all means. Have you one?"

"No; I have agents in town who look after my property there; but not a solicitor."

"Then take one from hence. Mr. Gallop is

highly recommended. Now I have my bullfinch upstairs that wants its breakfast, and I must attend to it."

Thereupon the lady left the room.

Christine, who had been watching Captain Fenton, saw that restraint was in his face and manner. He had addressed himself to her aunt and not to her, otherwise than by a formal salutation on entering the room.

She laid aside her letters and said, "Well, Roger, take a seat. I suppose you have now a word to cast to me?"

"Thank you, I am in haste, I had rather stand. I must be off on account of my uncle's death."

"Which took place whilst you were playing billiards," she said. She was nettled at his cool behaviour.

"I was not playing billiards," he retorted. "I went to the billiard-room to find a friend."

"What—Mr. Paste?"

"Mr. Paste is no friend of mine."

"I beg your pardon. One must not judge by appearances."

"Your escapade does not seem to have improved your temper," he said.

"Nor your association with Mr. Paste your manners," she retorted. "What do you mean by my escapade? The term is offensive."

"What else was it?" He was holding the back of a chair, and Chris noticed that he clutched it nervously, and tilted it forward and backward in an unmeaning manner.

"An escapade," said Chris, "means a breaking loose from the conventionalities and the proprieties of civilised life, does it not?"

"Something like it."

"It implies the free action of the will. I deny entirely that my will was called into requisition."

"Well—call it a most unfortunate affair. The whole town is ringing with it."

"Let it ring."

"It is not a pleasant thing for me to hear what is said, or hinted."

"You have no right to listen to anything hinted or expressed against me."

"But you gave occasion for it."

"It was an unlucky *contretemps*, and nothing more. I lost my way in a strange country, in the gathering darkness. I do not know where I should have been, on a jaded brute, stumbling at everything, unless Mr. Bates had come to my assistance."

"Yes, and Mr. Paste saw you both sitting as lively as two birds on the following morning, outside the 'Hunter's Moon.'"

"To be sure he did. What of that?"

"And you gave him the slip, so as not to have his company along the road back to Barnford."

"Certainly. If you know Mr. Paste that is a sufficient explanation; you will be aware that he is a most undesirable companion."

"But Mr. Bates was the reverse."

"Mr. Bates is a gentleman."

"You take up the cudgels for him."

"I state what is the case. He behaved to me with the utmost courtesy and kindness."

"It is a most vexatious matter, most distressing to me, and it has driven me—half crazed. I don't like to have your good name in every man's mouth to mangle with his canine teeth."

"Or woman's either, and their teeth are more poisonous than those of a man."

"I daresay that is the case; a man will bite out of mere frolic, a woman with intent to hurt."

"Let me tell you, Sir Roger, as I suppose I must now entitle you, that it was your place to have ridden to the hunt with me, and squired me."

"I could not, I knew that my uncle was dying. It would have been indecent for me to have been seen in the hunting field."

"And let me tell you further," pursued Chris,

"that it is your place to put a stop to idle talk about me, not to sit with open mouth and ears absorbing it all."

"What could I do? Were you not at the 'Hunter's Moon?' Was not Mr. Bates there as well? And did you not ride back with him? I could not run up and down Barnford with strips of diachylum and plaster up every mouth. You should not have given occasion for such an outbreak of miserable gossip."

"I was helpless, a victim to circumstances."

"It is most annoying to me to have to leave Barnford with all this talk going on."

"Then don't go. It is more distressing for me to sit here and have to endure it. It is your place to stand by me and help me to override it."

"How can I? Look at the telegram. I must be off to Fenton. My uncle is dead. Under the circumstances it is impossible."

"Where there is a will there is a way," retorted Chris, with true woman's instinct when attacked delivering a counter-attack. "It is positively shameful of you to desert me at this juncture."

"I cannot help myself; I must go. You would not have me put in no appearance at my uncle's funeral. I withdraw the word you object to and substitute indiscretion."

"Really, Captain—I mean Sir Roger Fenton, you ought to wear petticoats, you are so like a woman, so like my Aunt Laura. You hark back to the same point after I thought I had made it abundantly clear that I could have acted in no other way than I did. I was not disposed, to satisfy your scruples, to sit in a damp hedge all night, with my feet in the mud, under a dripping November sky, and with a poor, jaded, borrowed steed shivering at my side, ungroomed and unfed. I took shelter in the first inn I lit upon. There might, for aught I knew, have been half a dozen commercials there, and I should have saved my reputation by being one among them—with Tom who travels in the hosiery line, and Dick in the hardware, and Harry in Barum pottery. But as there was only Mr. Bates, the surgeon, all the Mr. and Mrs. Grundies in Barnford—and one of them has recently come into a baronetcy—all these hold up their hands in holy horror."

"I do assure you that I acquit you——" began Captain Fenton, but she cut him short. Her blood was up.

"Acquit me, indeed! Who constituted you judge over my actions? It is an insult to me to have you go back and back again to my supposed indiscretion when there was no indis-

cretion at all. Things happened as they did because they could not happen otherwise, given a jaded hunter, an unknown road, and a November evening."

"I have a right to express an opinion. I accept your explanation."

"For which you were not justified in asking. If I have explained, it is of my own free will. You ought to have taken for granted that I could do nothing that was unladylike and injudicious. I wish to goodness that Aunt Laura had done with her bullfinch and would come down and terminate this disagreeable interview."

"Do not be angry, Chris." He let the chair he was twirling about fall, and stooped and picked it up again.

"Remember that I was in the billiard-room with all those fellows when you and Bates rode jauntily by. Although they dared not say a word against you in my presence—Paste had previously stated the facts he had witnessed—yet I could see by the creases on their cheeks and about their lips that those fellows would burst forth into very objectionable talk so soon as my back was turned."

"I can see into your heart," said Chris, "as though you had a glass window in your breast. I see that you are inflated with pride at your

prospects. The girl whom you will condescend to elevate to be Lady Fenton must be like Cæsar's wife, above suspicion. Your head is turned now that plain Captain Fenton has blossomed out into Sir Roger, Bart. There, take my engagement ring. I will not wear it. I set you free that you may go a-questing for a more suitable Lady Fenton, and let me recommend you to one like little Miss Muffet, who sat on a tuffet, eating curds and whey, and who was so proper, and so demure, and so timorous, that when a spider—of course, a male specimen—came and sat down beside her, it frightened Miss Muffet away."

CHAPTER V

BETWIXT CUP AND LIP

"I have news to tell you: come, come, give me your hand.
Ah! my good lord, I grieve at what I speak,
And am right sorry to repeat what follows."

Henry VIII., Act v. Scene 1.

CAPTAIN Sir Roger Fenton did not speak much to Mr. Gallop, the lawyer who accompanied him, whilst they were in the train. Unable to leave Barnford before two o'clock, he managed to catch the corridor express at Exeter and arrived in town at eight. He had wired to the housekeeper at his chambers in Ormerod Place, and dinner awaited him and Mr. Gallop.

He had been very silent on the way, taken up with his own thoughts, which were of a mixed description. To come into a fine estate, with a noble residence and a title, was enough to make any man elate; but on the other hand he had quarrelled with the nicest girl he knew, and one to whom he was sincerely attached.

Perhaps he had been unduly severe—as what had occurred that occasioned the rupture was pure accident; but he had desired to im-

press on her the strictness of his views on feminine decorum, and he had been intensely irritated at the way in which her adventure had been talked about. That, however, the rupture was so serious as to be final he did not suppose. He was convinced that Christine was fond of him. He knew that her situation, as dependent on a selfish and exacting aunt, was trying, and the position he offered her was not one a girl so placed was likely to reject in a fit of ill-humour.

He was dissatisfied with himself. He had been too peremptory with her. She should have been sympathised with, not reproached. But she had angered him by the way in which, at the first token that he was about to remonstrate with her, she had fallen on him with fixed bayonet.

What had taken place in the billiard-room had been this. He had met Mr. Paste, who in his tactless manner had button-holed him and said, "I think that Miss Lavenham enjoyed herself famously yesterday. We had a rare day on Exmoor, and she was well squired too. Tom Bates was most attentive. You could not have been more so. We lost them towards the end of the day. But I saw them both this morning sitting in the verandah of the 'Hunter's Moon.' Nice little inn that,

snug little retreat. I offered my escort, but they declined, and when I drew near later in the day, they gave me the go-by—ha, ha, ha!"

To which he had replied haughtily, "Miss Lavenham chooses her own escort, and objects to persons forcing themselves on her uninvited."

The look he had given Mr. Paste had checked further impertinence, but next moment a gentleman standing by the window had thrown up the sash, and shouted, "Here they come!" and the billiard players had rushed forward to witness the arrival of Mr. Bates and Miss Lavenham.

No wonder he had been angered.

At dinner, Captain Fenton was more inclined for conversation.

"By the way," said Mr. Gallop, "I suppose you have communicated with the solicitors of your deceased uncle. What are their names?"

"Graham and Scott. No, it did not occur to me."

"You should have done it. You say that there is no relation at the house; there was no responsible person with the deceased."

"No one—only servants."

"They will not have done so. You see, not one of them thought of wiring to you."

"That is true. I had not considered this."

"Probably that is what was meant by your

friend, and expressed in his telegram. Graham and Scott will have your uncle's will."

"I am very sorry if I have given you unnecessary trouble."

"Do not mention that. I place myself at your disposal. I may be of some use."

"I know nothing of the formalities to be gone through on such an occasion."

"You will have to see what cash is in the house, and how much in the bank, and call in a licensed valuer to take stock of the contents of the house, the cellar, the stables, and coach-house. That will be for probate, but probably Messrs. Graham and Scott will expect to undertake the proving of your uncle's will. Who had charge of the plate?"

"I presume the butler. His name is Treneman."

"How about the jewels?"

"Of them I know nothing. My uncle was never married, and had no sisters, so that none could have been dispersed, and they have probably remained locked up and unlooked at for thirty years."

"It is very awkward—a house full of wealth of all sorts in the hands of domestics who do not communicate with you, even with the parson, when the master dies. They may be honest, but they may not, and there has been

no check on them. Shall we see Messrs. Graham and Scott before starting for Fenton to-morrow?"

"No, I want to be down there early. Be prepared for breakfast at eight, and we will catch a train at half-past nine."

Next day Captain Fenton and Mr. Gallop descended at the country station and took a cab for Fenton.

"Drive first to the Rectory," ordered the Captain, and then inside to the solicitor, "I must thank my friend Hindley for wiring, and learn a few particulars."

"Yes," replied the lawyer. "And ascertain the lie of the land. You are right."

Presently the flyman laboriously descended from the box at a white gate, which he proceeded to hook open, and then, slow of movement, reascended to his seat to drive about a hundred yards between banks of laurel to the parsonage door.

At the sound of wheels on the gravel, the Rector came out. He was a hale, cheery man, with a kindly eye. He had clearly been expecting the visit. He opened the cab door before the driver, who was rocking himself on his seat, had acquired sufficient momentum to enable him without much effort to slide himself over the side to the ground.

"Glad you are come first to me; I particularly want to have some words with you before you go to the Court. Will you introduce me, Fenton, to your friend?"

The Captain did as desired, and the Rector led the way within.

"Here," said he, "this side, into my snuggery. We shall not be interrupted there. Will you have something to eat and drink? Some sherry or whisky and soda? No!—well you will want something. I have some queer news for you. Glad you have Mr. Gallop with you. There are things that want looking into. Take your seats, please. Let me dismiss the driver; you will hardly need him more. If you do wish to have your portmanteaus taken on to the Court, I will send them there. That is a matter for your decision when you have heard what I have to report."

"I will settle with the fellow," said Fenton, and left the room.

On his return he saw that the solicitor's face was grave. The Rector had already told him something of import. A solicitor's countenance is usually unexpressive of feeling; it is concentrated, not diffusive. It takes in information, and shows that it does so; but it does not gush with sympathy.

"Now, then, what is it?" asked the Captain.

"Well, Roger," said the Rector, "to be plain with you, you have a pill to swallow, and must not make wry faces over it. There may be a mistake. I hope and trust there is. This is what has happened. A person has arrived at the Court with a little boy, and she asserts that she is Lady Fenton, and that the child is now baronet."

"Good heavens!" gasped the Captain, dropping into a chair, and his face became a great deal more blank than that of Mr. Gallop.

"It is so," pursued the Rector. "Before the breath was out of the body of Sir John, up drove a fly to the Court, and set down a lady, with her child, and a man whom she described as her legal adviser. She maintains that she is the widow of Sir John, and that the child is his."

"Had you heard that the deceased was married?" asked the solicitor.

"Never heard a word of it. I cannot make it out. A lawyer would hardly stand by her to sustain her claim if it were a palpable fraud. It is a mystery to me. But come, have a glass of sherry.

"No, thank you," said the Captain hastily. "Tell me everything you know."

"It is not much that I do know. You are aware that Sir John and I never hit it off together. He did not attend church, and dis-

countenanced his servants doing so. He never asked me to the house, and accorded me only a stiff bow when we chanced to meet. However, when he was ill I went to the Court and asked to see him, but Treneman, the butler, told me that Sir John had given instructions that I was not to be admitted. So soon as I knew by report that he was dead I went again, and found the lady and her lawyer in possession. They are making all necessary arrangements for the funeral."

"What sort of a person is she?" asked the Captain.

"I should say—hardly a lady. But I am not able to speak with any confidence. She said very few words, the lawyer took everything upon himself, and spoke for her. Now, what will you do? Go on, or remain here? It would hardly be seemly to have a dispute in the house whilst the corpse is there. On the other side, it is not right to suffer these people to occupy the Court and manage everything, unless they can show that they have a right to do so. Now you see the force of my telegraphic recommendation."

"Yes," said Mr. Gallop, "I can manage that for Captain Fenton. Let him remain here, sir, and enjoy your hospitality, and I will go on to the house, and see the lady's solicitor.

I will require him to authenticate her claim—and there need be no fuss nor scene."

Fenton acquiesced. He was greatly dejected by what he had heard.

"Look here," continued the Rector, "Treneman is, as I believe, thoroughly honest and dependable. I had a few words with him last night. He intimated that he knew more of this matter than did anyone else, and I am sure would be glad to see you and communicate all he knows."

"Then," said Mr. Gallop, "with your permission I will be present at the interview, and will ask you to send for the butler. Till I have heard his story, and have seen the legal adviser of the claimant, I shall not be in a position as to what recommendation to make to my client."

"There was a housekeeper, I forget her name," said Roger Fenton; "do you think she was privy to this marriage—if marriage there were?"

"Can't say. I had not many words with Treneman," answered Mr. Hindley, the rector. "Her name is Warrender, and she was in favour with Sir John, so much so that I should not have been surprised if he had married her. He had invented for himself a church, and she was one of the chosen people. There were not half a dozen sealed members anywhere, but she

was one. When I called, Treneman answered the bell. I could see that he was heartily glad that I had called. He was looking worried. He told me that these people had invaded the house, and he had no right to exclude them, but he gave me a bunch of keys. I shall hand them over to you, Roger. He told me that they unlocked the cabinet and private drawers, and he put with them the key of the plate. He desired me to take them till it was settled who had a right to the house and all its contents. I doubted whether it was my duty to accept the responsibility, but he urged it on me, and you shall have them, and from me, Roger. Treneman had no time to say more, for the lawyer and the lady came upon us out of the dining-room. I suppose they heard our voices. He walked up to me and said, 'The vicar of the parish, I suppose?' I corrected him and said I was rector. Then he informed me that Lady Fenton, the widow of the deceased baronet, was there, and that the funeral would take place on Saturday, and would be conducted very quietly—it was her ladyship's express wish. I had but a word with her, and the lawyer bowed me out. I'll send my boy round to the Court, and tell Treneman that you are here, and he will come as soon as he can. I believe him to be a worthy fellow."

CHAPTER VI

TRENEMAN

"Lend thy serious hearing
To what I shall unfold."—*Hamlet*, Act i. Scene 5.

DURING the day Mr. Gallop walked over to the Court, and had an interview with the legal adviser of the personage who represented herself as Lady Fenton.

It was not probable, the Rector said, that Treneman would be able to come over to the parsonage till evening.

Mr. Gallop returned with very little or no satisfaction to his client or himself. He had found Mr. Starkie, the solicitor from Wynstead, quite prepared to meet him, and to answer inquiries. He had shown Mr. Gallop the certificate of the marriage of Sir John Fenton with Eliza Smith, before a registrar in London, and those of the birth and baptism of the boy at Wynstead. Now the only thing unusual about them was that in neither case had Sir John been given his title, but had been described simply as "gentleman."

"The only bit of advice I can give you," said Mr. Gallop to the Captain, "is not very professional, and that is to swallow your disappointment, and put on it as good a face as you can. We will, however, await the butler, and see whether what he has to tell will afford us any additional light."

Treneman did not arrive until some time after dinner, when the gentlemen were sitting over the fire with their glasses of wine and cigarettes. During the meal Fenton had laboured to make himself agreeable to Mrs. Hindley, but the labour had been apparent. He was crushed by what he had heard. For years he had hoped for, of late had calculated on, the succession to the honours and estate of his uncle. Not a whisper had reached him to the effect that the old gentleman was married and had issue male. For some years he had entertained a fear lest Sir John should take it into his head in old age to marry, but as time went on, and the Baronet became more of a religious crank, and retreated more and more from society, this fear gave way to confidence. And now he found all his expectations dashed to the ground like a house of cards, and he was stunned by his misfortune.

The solicitor, who was not so touched, was in a conversational mood, told his good stories,

kept the ball rolling, and when Mrs. Hindley withdrew, plunged into politics with the Rector, and left Fenton to his gloomy meditations.

It was plain to the Captain that with this blight on his prospects all chance of a reconciliation with Christine was gone. To him it was a relief when the servant entered the dining-room to announce that Mr. Treneman had arrived, and would like to speak to her master.

"Show him in, Susan—show him in," said Mr. Hindley, and next moment the butler entered, wearing a light paletot over his black suit.

He was a broad-shouldered man, with that respectable cast of face which a butler cultivates as a part of his stock-in-trade. He wore grey whiskers, but was otherwise clean shaven. A servant's face is hard to read, for he wears a mask habitually, yet through the vizard looked a pair of unmistakably honest eyes.

"Sit down, Treneman," said the Rector; "sit down and have a glass of port. Captain Fenton and Mr. Gallop will be interested in what you have to say, and so, indeed, shall I, for I was struck all of a heap by the apparition at the Court. I might have expected to encounter the traditional ghostly Grey Lady, but I was unprepared for the Lady in Black.

I might have laid the first, but the other requires other exorcisms than I can find between the covers of my Prayer-book. Sit down, pray."

"Thank you, sir, I would rather stand," replied the butler, "and I am at the service of the gentlemen for an hour. After that I must be back, or there will be inquiries about me as to where I have been. That lawyer who came with my lady is suspicious."

"Well, Treneman, tell us all you can about this strange matter."

"If you will allow me, sir, I will begin at the beginning."

"Certainly, don't take hold of a ferret by the tail," said the lawyer.

"Then, gentlemen, I believe it all commenced with Sir John having his portrait taken in London by a distinguished artist whose name I forget, but which could easily be ascertained. There, I believe, he met occasionally, perhaps frequently, an artist's model, either sitting when he arrived or going away; somehow they did contrive to come across one another with increased frequency, and an intimacy sprang up, and Sir John fell desperately in love, and proposed to marry her."

"There is no fool like an old fool," observed Mr. Gallop.

"No, sir, but Sir John was not quite such a

fool as you might think. Her name was Eliza Smith, and she was not his equal in position, so he was ashamed of himself, and did not choose that it should be made public. They were married—that was ten years ago."

"It was so," said the solicitor; "I have seen a copy of the certificate."

"Where did they go after the marriage? Where spend the honeymoon?" asked the Rector.

"Of course he did not bring her to the Court," said the lawyer.

"Gentlemen, where he went I do not know, but he settled her at Wynstead, and it was an arrangement between them that she was to be called Mrs. Fenton and not 'My Lady.' He made that stipulation at an early stage, and he threatened that if she did not submit he would withdraw her allowance."

"He had no legal right to make such a stipulation," said Mr. Gallop.

"I daresay not, sir, but she was not a pushing and exacting person, and he very peremptory and despotic. Well, shortly after their marriage there ensued a quarrel, and Sir John refused after that to see her, and he never even would see the boy when it was born."

"I have a copy of the certificate of both marriage and birth," said Mr. Gallop.

"It is my opinion, gentlemen," pursued Mr. Treneman, "that Sir John was ashamed of what he had done, and also afraid—you will excuse me, gentlemen—of Mrs. Warrender, the housekeeper, who was a sealed member of his sect. She and the kitchenmaid were in it up to the ears; the rest of the servants off and on. They had to endure being preached to and prayed about. You see, gentlemen, Sir John was rather given to personalities when he prayed extrumpery—like a Boer, gentlemen, he went down on his knees to take a good shot at anyone. But Mrs. Warrender was about him like a bluebottle about a shoulder of cold mutton, and he could no more shake her off than the mutton can free itself from the fly. He was afraid of her, and he was afraid of the public coming to hear of it—lest ridicule should come on his Church of the Elect. So when there was a quarrel——"

"When was that?" asked the solicitor.

"Can't say exactly. You see, sir, I knew nothing of it till Sir John was obliged to employ me as a go-between, to take the quarterly allowance to her at Wynstead. Then he only told me as much as he chose, the rest I obtained from her, and what I put together."

"Then you took to her the money every three months?"

"Yes, sir. Sir John did not relish sending cheques, lest his name should come out at Wynstead, so he used to send the money in cash by me."

"What was her conduct at Wynstead?"

"Oh, most respectable; I never heard a word against her there. But gentlefolk looked shy at her, not knowing what she was, as she was not a widow, and yet had her boy, and no husband to show or speak about. She got took up by that lawyer, but not by many folk."

"How did she know that Sir John was dying?"

"That is more than I can say, sir. I don't believe there was a servant in the Court that suspected he was married. But that lawyer, Mr. Starkie, may have made inquiries, and commissioned someone on the spot to report to him. When the cab drove up to the door, and she and the lawyer and the boy got out, you might have knocked me down with a feather, and Mr. Starkie said that this was Lady Fenton, and the lad was the Baronet. I could not refuse to admit them, knowing what I did."

"The property is entailed, I think you told me," said Mr. Gallop, turning to his client.

"Yes, strictly."

"You say that Sir John would not acknowledge the boy."

"No, sir, he never even saw him. He never saw the lady after the quarrel, and that was shortly after they were married."

"And she is quite respectable?"

"Entirely so, so far as I could learn."

"Mr. Treneman," said the solicitor, "may I inquire were you sufficiently in the confidence of the deceased Baronet to be aware whether he made any will?"

"Can't say, sir, I really can't. But I doubt it. He was very peculiar in his ideas, and he believed that he would never die. He said he was a second Enoch, and that he had received the assurance that he would be translated without tasting death. He said he would outlive his nephew and the lady and the boy. Those that listened to him, and believed what he said, he anointed with oil and said they were sealed, and would not die; I called it enoculated—it was my little joke, but as it came to his ears, and he was very angry, I am sorry I made it."

"You had some influence with him?"

"Not much, sir. You see, I never could bring myself to pretend that I believed all he said. He looked on me as a worldling and lost for ever. But he could not get rid of me, or do without me, because I knew of the affair of the lady at Wynstead. It was just that which made him keep me, and because he could not find

a man to take my place who would consent to be Enoch—I mean, become a sealed member. He had hopes of a footman once—till he caught him playing cards with the housemaids. He was very sure of the cook, till one evening when he had been expounding for an hour, she went to sleep and snored. He turned her and the footman both away."

"Did no doctor see him?"

"Yes—I brought one in, but it made him very indignant. He would answer no questions nor take any medicines. He said that he was not going to die, he knew it by revelation. Now, gentlemen, I think I have told you all. If there be a will, it will probably be in the bureau, and Mr. Hindley here has the keys. That lawyer, Mr. Starkie, asked for them, and I said I had not got them, but I did not tell him I had given them to his reverence. I do not think he will venture to break the locks, and if he sends for the blacksmith to pick them, I will contrive that he shall be out of the way till after the funeral."

"Thank you much, Treneman, for what you have told us," said the Rector, and the solicitor and Captain Fenton united in expressing their gratitude.

Then Treneman withdrew.

"It looks uncommonly ugly," said Mr. Gallop;

"I had hoped that by a will he might have made provision for you, Captain—but if he has not, why it is a bad job for you. However, Messrs. Graham and Scott may possess the document; they are certain to have advised him to make his will."

CHAPTER VII

FOOD FOR POWDER

"What's gone, and what's past help
Should be past grief."

The Winter's Tale, Act iii. Scene 2.

CAPTAIN Roger Fenton was one of those high-strung, nervous men who are sanguine and jubilant at one moment, and at the least reverse become limp and despondent. He had looked for his good fortune with such assured eyes that when it threatened to disappear, he lost heart at once. If over-confident before, he was over-depressed now.

Mr. and Mrs. Hindley found him indisposed to converse, but made ready allowance for him. The Rector was himself bitterly disappointed. It would have been a vast pleasure to him to have an old school comrade as his squire. Captain Fenton and the solicitor remained at the Rectory for the funeral of the Baronet. After the old man was laid in the family vault, the party returned to the Court, and then for the first time Captain Fenton saw the lady whom he must henceforth recognise as his aunt.

The mourners, consisting of the widow and her son, the Captain, and the three lawyers, assembled in the breakfast-room. Mr. Scott represented the firm of the family's solicitors.

Mrs. Warrender also remained. Roger looked at the widow expecting her to exercise her authority and require the domestic to withdraw, but the lady was either unconscious of the woman's presumption, or too fresh in her position to use her right. Lady Fenton turned at every moment for direction to her lawyer, incapable of independent resolution. She was a slender woman, with large, soft, violet eyes, under long dark lashes; although she may have been nearly forty years old, she was still remarkably attractive; her widow's weeds displayed to admiration her pale, well-formed face and beautiful eyes. She must have been extraordinarily lovely when young. There was, however, a lack of animation and of expression in her face, but this was the less noticeable now when affected to tears by her situation. She could hardly be weeping at her loss; it was rather because the exhibition of sorrow was to her congruous. Her appearance was distinctly ladylike and prepossessing. But it gave Captain Fenton a shock when she opened her mouth and spoke in a cockney dialect. If she could remain mute, she would be a very

passable "My Lady," but the tongue revealed her low extraction and lack of education. The boy but slightly resembled his mother, and bore no likeness to the deceased Baronet. He was sandy-headed, and had a large mouth. He was restless and undisciplined. Clearly his mother spoiled him, and he was beyond her control.

"Mother! I say, mother! I want a horange. What are all these blokes here for?"

"Be quiet, John; be a good boy."

"I won't be quiet. I want a horange."

"I'll get you one directly. You must wait."

"I won't wait. I want it now, and then to go and see the 'osses."

"I am busy. Don't you see these gentlemen? Pray be'ave yourself."

"I think, My Lady," said Mr. Starkie, "that it would be well to allow Sir John to leave the room and amuse himself. He cannot understand the sad position in which he is placed.

> 'Such perpetual droppings
> These young hearts can leastways bear.'

One of our poets made this remark, but I am not sure I have the words correctly, though I retain the sense."

And the boy was removed, though not without screams and a struggle.

"I may as well state," said Mr. Scott, "that no will was deposited with us by our client, and that he did not consult us about drawing one up. If one has been made, it is unknown to us, and it will probably be in the house. I would advise, if none has been found, that a search should be instituted."

"None has been found," said Mr. Starkie; "we have not got the keys."

"I have them," said Captain Fenton, as he produced the bunch.

Mr. Starkie raised his eyebrows. "Very extraordinary," he said. "May I inquire how you came to be possessed of them?"

"Certainly," retorted Roger. "But I shall not inform you. That is my affair." Then turning to Lady Fenton he said, "Madam, with your consent I would suggest that these three gentlemen, who represent yourself, me, and my deceased uncle, should proceed to make a thorough investigation in order to find the will, if one exists."

"If the Baronet had a confidential attendant, a valet, he may be useful to point out to us where the late Sir John kept his papers," said Mr. Gallop.

"I can do that. I know everythink. He trusted me as I was sealed," said Mrs. Warrender.

"I said a valet," observed Mr. Gallop coldly.

"There is the butler," remarked the widow timidly.

"Call him," said Mr. Gallop.

Mrs. Warrender did not budge.

"Are you the housekeeper?" inquired the solicitor for Captain Fenton.

"Yes, sir, I ham."

"Then summon the butler at once. I am not aware that your presence is required any more than that of the other domestics, the butler excepted."

"I—me!" exclaimed the indignant woman. "As to my going, I want to 'ear what's coming to me as much as does her ladyship." She threw a tone of contempt into the title. "Her as has tumbled down the chimbley or popped up hout of the drains more like. I've my rights to what Sir John leaves. 'Aven't I been prayed at and preached to and enochulated, and 'aven't I listened by the hour to his expoundings of Scripture till I nigh dropped out of my chair with fatigue! So 'aven't I to be rewarded for all I've put up with all these twelve years? I'll call Treneman, but I tell you, gents, Sir John made no count of him. He wasn't a sealed member and I was, nor in his confidence, and I was."

"Mrs. Warrender," said Mr. Starkie, "if

you dare to so forget yourself before her ladyship again, you shall be turned out of the house, expelled bag and baggage instantly."

Somewhat awed by the threat, the wrathful housekeeper, who had so long ruled despotically, flounced out of the room.

On Mr. Treneman's arrival, the three solicitors requested him to show them the study, and point out to them where the late Baronet kept his deeds and letters and accounts. When they departed with him, Captain Fenton was left with the widow. The situation was awkward. He addressed a few courteous words to her, and she replied.

Then he made a remark on the weather to which she assented.

Next he inquired if she had been into the conservatory. No, she had not.

Thereupon ensued a lull, broken at last by a deep sigh, and the exclamation—

"Servants is awful. Do you keep many, sir?"

"I cannot say that I do."

"How I shall get along with them in this big 'ouse, I don't know," and another sigh.

Then, unable to maintain a conversation on the sole topic that seemed to interest her, he made the excuse that as the gentlemen would hardly be back for half an hour, he would like

to stroll about the house, and visit the stables, as he had not been to the Court for some years. At the mention of the stables she became alive and said, "And please, sir, if you see my Johnnie, tell him to mind and not get kicked by the 'osses."

Fenton Court was a comparatively modern house. It had none of the quiet beauty of an Elizabethan mansion, with its galleries and panelled rooms, with carved mantelshelves and moulded plaster ceilings, nor the cold style of a Queen Anne residence with tall windows and lofty rooms, that was compact. It had been erected in the Georgian era, when all the seven lamps of beauty had been extinguished. It possessed, nevertheless, comfortable rooms, and a respectable hall with a good staircase in it.

Externally, the house was plastered, and the plaster repainted with drab oil-colour every six years.

At the entrance were pillars, and a pediment in the centre, and the coat-of-arms in the pediment on a shield. The pillars, or rather pilasters, were of cement over brick. On each side of the body of the building extended wings that were but one story high. One wing had been intended to serve as a ballroom, but had been converted by Sir John into a meeting-house or chapel, in which he held forth to his

servants, and such tenants as could be prevailed on to attend.

It was noticed by scoffers that a cottager in want of a new pigsty, or farmer desirous of having additional outhouses for his cattle, was assiduous at these gatherings till that asked for was given, whereupon his attendance became slack and finally ceased.

The other wing contained the library. The additions made to the old collection of books were mainly works on the Apocalypse, for, as Mrs. Warrender had said, "The master was great in Apoplectic studies."

The house no longer answered to the name given to it, when it was erected as a quadrangle, in the reign of Henry VII. The new mansion possessed no other court than the stableyard.

Captain Fenton wandered about the grounds, much engaged in thought. "As to her," he said to himself, "she is limp, and is in the hands of that attorney, who will constitute himself agent, bailiff, adviser, secretary, factotum, and will line his pockets out of the estates."

After half an hour he returned to the morning-room. He found the widow seated there as he had left her, her hands in her lap, looking blankly at the fire. Obviously her early habit of sitting as an artist's model had accustomed her to inaction.

Again Captain Fenton attempted conversation, and failed once more. A few sentences relative to her boy, whom he had seen with the groom in the stables, called up animation to her face.

Then with relief he heard the voices of the gentlemen as they approached from the library. They entered the breakfast-room, and Lady Fenton languidly turned her head as they came in.

"Well," said Mr. Scott, "or rather, not well but ill, we have found no last will, and we have searched for it everywhere. You, Mr. Starkie, will, I presume, take out an administration."

"And I shall enter a *caveat*," said Mr. Gallop.

"No will! What am I to get?" inquired Mrs. Warrender, who had forced her way into the apartment. "No will! Where is what he promised over and over to leave me?"

"You get nothing," replied Mr. Starkie.

"He told me he'd leave me well provided for."

"You get nothing at all, Mrs. Warrender, except your instant discharge."

"And all goes to that there twopenny-ha'-penny woman as calls 'erself 'is widow?"

"Leave the room instantly, and pack your box and be off."

"Then all I can say is—Sir John was no better than a cantankerous old crocodile."

"Please, sir;" said a footman, entering with an envelope on a salver, "here is a telegram sent on from the Rectory for Captain Fenton."

Roger opened it, handed the paper to Mr. Gallop, and said: "It is as well—ordered to join my regiment for the Transvaal. I am indifferent. All my expectations are disappointed —I may as well go out and become in Africa food for Boer powder."

CHAPTER VIII

A DINNER WITH SAUCE

"Truly—Pleasure will be paid, one time or another."
Twelfth Night, Act ii. Scene 4.

"MY dear—I wish it," said Lady Laura; "I have accepted Mrs. Parkhouse's invitation, and I desire you to accompany me."

"But, aunt, I am in no humour for it."

"I can understand that. But we go into society to drive our bad humours away or to gloss them over. I can quite understand your being out of spirits, I should be the same if I had committed the incredible, unfeminine folly of breaking an engagement with a man of such prospects as Sir Roger Fenton."

"I could not help myself. He assumed towards me a tone which I would not endure."

"You mounted the high horse when you should have ridden the lowly cob. No wonder he was angry. I cannot blame him. If you choose to tear about the country in the society of a medical student, and put up with him at a public-house, it is enough to make any man look askance at you."

"You exaggerate, aunt; I have already told you——"

"It is of no use discussing this further. It is enough to vex a saint to find you committing one blunder after another. Mind—you dine at Mrs. Parkhouse's to-night. You must put a bold face on the matter."

So it was settled.

At about seven o'clock the carriage was at the door to receive the ladies. Chris was very prettily dressed in yellow silk with lace, and a yellow rose in her hair. A little hectic colour was in her olive cheek.

They drove to the house of Mrs. Parkhouse, a well-to-do and passably connected lady who lived in a handsome residence out of the town, the empty shell of a landed county family that had been let to her, whilst the owners recruited under the heavy burden of estate duty..

On their arrival, when shown into the drawing-room the hostess received Lady Laura with gushing cordiality. But her eyebrows went up, and her lips pursed as she took Miss Lavenham's hand—she looked at her frigidly and said—

"So very glad that you are come. I had quite given you up. I had been told such a sad story about your being tired by a hunt the other day, that quite incapacitated you from

exercise. Delighted that it is not so. I shall have to find you a partner—let me see. Who are disengaged? Ah! there is Mr. Gleig, to be sure, Mr. Gleig will do very well."

Accordingly, this gentleman, who was young, with much side on, conducted Christine to the dining-room. She knew him slightly, and did not care particularly for him.

To her great dissatisfaction she found herself placed at table between him and Mr. Paste.

The Parkhouses kept a good table, and the dinner was excellent. But Chris had no appetite, and scarcely knew what she was eating. She certainly looked pretty, even the women allowed that.

During the meal young Gleig endeavoured to make himself agreeable by speaking of Captain Fenton as his intimate friend, and by saying what a good sort he was; telling how they had made acquaintance, how they had shot together, with a few sporting anecdotes thrown in; how lucky a fellow Fenton was, but how deserving he was of his good fortune.

Gleig had heard that Christine was engaged to the Captain, and concluded that the topic would accordingly be acceptable to his partner. He had not perceived what had been noticed by every woman present, that she no longer wore her engagement ring.

To make matters worse, she was aware that Mrs. Fotheringay, who sat on the further side of young Gleig, also Miss Quillim, the lady opposite, were drinking in every word. Indeed, the latter lady said in an undertone to her partner, "I really wish that Mr. Gleig would not talk about Captain Fenton to Miss Lavenham, it makes her so uncomfortable. You know that the engagement is off between them —and no wonder, for she really did behave in a most extraordinary manner. But there is insanity in the family; you are aware, of course, that her father destroyed himself, and this must serve as her excuse."

At length, irritated beyond endurance by Mr. Gleig, Chris turned her head, and at once Mr. Paste plunged into dialogue.

"Glad to meet you again, Miss Lavenham."

"Thank you."

"Under such different circumstances. And now I can have the talk denied on the way back from the 'Hunter's Moon.' You were not in at the death. Glorious run. We killed near Simon's Bath. But you know your affairs best. It is not only foxes that are hunted on field days."

She turned her shoulder to him, but he would not be silenced.

"Miss Lavenham, this is too bad. We

must have our chat now. By George! if I had a pretty girl out with me I'd slacken pace and ride with her, instead of following the hounds. Well, how did you find the 'Hunter's Moon'? I did not go there, too dull for me. I went——"

"Among kindred spirits—commercials," said Chris, in a fit of exasperation. "Birds of a feather flock together."

He collapsed.

Then she turned to young Gleig. At once he recommenced on the same topic as before.

"By Jove! To come in for ten thousand a year, and not to have had any bother of working for it. This is being born with a gold spoon in your mouth. Will he keep a pack? Has the estate been preserved? Trust me, I'll help him to thin the birds; he is sure to invite me to his place."

It was with inexpressible relief that Chris saw Lady Laura catch her hostess's eye, and move to rise.

The ladies left the room, and adjourned to the parlour, which was illumined by an amber light from the shaded lamps.

Chris seated herself upon an ottoman, between a Miss Madeley and the wife of a vicar of an adjoining parish. Neither addressed a word to her. Miss Madeley turned her back and

fell into rapid conversation with another lady across a stretch of carpet. Christine spoke to the vicar's wife, a quiet-looking, rather dowdy personage.

"I hear that you have a fine screen in your church."

To which the lady replied drily, "It is much admired, I believe."

"It is very old, is it not?"

"Yes."

"Is it likely to be restored?"

"Money is wanting."

"Why not have a bazaar?"

"My husband objects to bazaars."

"But nowadays people will not give unless they get something in return—a pin-cushion or a penwiper."

"Possibly."

Unable to get any further Chris changed her place, but again failed to start a conversation with a married lady who sat near. She made feeble remarks about the weather.

"Ah, yes, November is bad for anyone, except hunters"; and at once began to talk to a lady on her other side.

Chris took up a photographic album, and turned over the pages. Her cheeks burnt. Her lips were dry.

Then a fresh, pleasant girl—Mabel Tallboys

—(the family had recently taken to spelling their name Tallebois), crossed the room, and seating herself on a corner of the sofa, began to chat agreeably. Chris was grateful, and at once responded.

Before many minutes, however, she saw Mrs. Tallboys, on the further side of the room, signalling to her daughter to come to her.

Mabel perceived this and coloured, and apologising to Christine, went to her mother, who said to her in a low tone, "Go and talk to Marian Webb. I do not desire you to know Miss Lavenham."

Chris did not hear the words, but could judge from the flutter into which the girl was thrown, and the severe expression of Mrs. Tallboys, that Mabel had received a reprimand for engaging in conversation with her.

Presently the gentlemen came in, and several gathered round Chris. They were not disinclined to talk with her, but she was uncomfortable. She fancied that she was able to detect in their manner an air of freedom in speaking to her that she did not like. It was probably, it was almost certainly, a delusion, but her nerves were overstrung, she was wounded to the quick at the slights she had received, and she imagined what did not actually exist.

As she drove back to Longridge with her

aunt, the latter remained silent for half the journey, and then suddenly broke silence with "Chris, you must visit your aunt Babs. Go to the poulterer's and order a hamper of game, and write that you are going up to town with it. It won't do for you to remain here. It would spoil my winter. People will not invite me out if they think that you will accompany me, and I am not going to live as a hermitess on your account. Yes, you shall go to my sister Bab's, and I will tell everyone you are staying with the Earl and Countess of Brendon. It will prove an emollient to opinion, and tend to make folk judge you leniently."

CHAPTER IX

PARTING

"Methinks your looks are sad, your cheer appall'd:
Hath the late overthrow wrought this offence?"
Henry VI., First Part, Act i. Scene 2.

CHRISTINE'S heart was eaten into as by a corrosive acid. She felt acutely the humiliation to which she had been subjected, but not the least the manner in which her aunt Laura was disposed to cast her over, when her presence jeopardised her prospects of social intercourse and pleasant entertainments in the little country town she inhabited, and of which she considered herself the queen.

Christine was clear-sighted enough to perceive that her aunt, by her overbearing manner, had offended a good many people of that class which is shouldering into recognition, and that those on whom she had not deigned to call, and such as she passed without recognition, although introduced, were avenging themselves on Lady Laura through herself. But Lady Laura did not for a moment dream of this as a

productive cause of the annoyance she felt; she attributed it entirely to the flighty conduct of her niece, who had laid herself open to much comment.

Moreover, Chris suffered acutely through the estrangement with Captain Fenton, whom she loved with all the force of her fresh and hearty nature. Her aunt was deeply offended with her at having broken off the engagement. "You could have got him to overlook it, by a little judicious and dexterous management. You should have burst into tears and sobbed and wrung your hands. Men melt under woman's tears like sugar in tea. You should have pictured yourself as persecuted by the vulgar attentions of that objectionable medical student."

"But Mr. Bates is in full practice."

"Never mind, he was a medical student a twelvemonth ago, I daresay. You should have drawn a lively painting of your flight from his civilities to the protection of the landlady of the 'Hunter's Moon.' You really might have harrowed his soul with such a story, and brought him to your feet, and trampled on him."

"But it is not true. Mr. Bates behaved in the most becoming manner."

"That is neither here nor there. All things

are lawful, all expedient to a woman who tries to save her reputation, and chain a man—and he a baronet with ten thousand a year. Why, Chris, to break your engagement at this juncture is to lay yourself open to the most unpleasant comment. Everyone in the town will think now that there must be something in this affair. Of course everybody is aware that he has cast you off."

"It was I who freed him, and returned the ring."

"The more fool you. I have no patience with you. You have put me in a most uncomfortable position. We must get Lady Brendon to present you. That will stop malicious mouths."

"I will go to Aunt Barbara on Monday. I will look out the train."

Unfortunately the only railway guide in the house was three months old, and this Chris did not notice when she made her arrangements.

When, on Monday, she arrived at the station, she found that the time-table had been altered on the first of October, and that the express to town started half an hour later than was the case during the summer season. Consequently she had to wait on the platform and occupy her time with studying advertisements of hams and teas, and looking at the coloured

pictures inviting to tours in Cornwall and Normandy.

And precisely this circumstance led to her meeting Captain Fenton, who returned to Barnford whilst she was expecting her train.

As he descended from the carriage he saw her, and after a moment's hesitation, went up to her where she stood at the bookstall reading the backs of the novels offered for sale, and pretending to do this with interest.

He forced himself on her notice, and raising his hat, said, "I hardly expected to see you here."

"I am on my way to town on a visit to Lady Barbara Fitzwarden—my aunt. I start in twenty minutes."

"For how long?"

"Some weeks."

"And I am off to South Africa. I am under orders to rejoin my regiment, and proceed immediately to the seat of war. So there is no saying—we may never meet again. It is possible I may lay my bones—my worthless bones—on the veldt."

"I must congratulate you on the prospect of seeing active service for your Queen, under the dear old flag, Sir Roger."

"Don't call me that. I am not Sir Roger."

"How so? I suppose——"

"It is all a mistake. My uncle had been privately married, and has a son, who is now Sir John Fenton—a cub of ten, who has snapped everything out of my mouth. I am no good to anyone now."

"To your Queen and country surely."

"Ah, possibly. May I be allowed a last word with you in the first-class waiting-room?"

His face was haggard; he looked unhappy. She saw this, and pitied him.

"Certainly," she replied; "I have a few minutes at my disposal."

There was no one in the room into which he ushered her.

"I am glad to be able to say a few words to you," he began, "and to apologise for what I may have said the other day. I was hasty, but I was greatly offended and harassed; still, I had no right to assume, as you expressed it, the office of judge over your actions. It is all over between us. I know that surely enough, and I feel it deeply. I have loved you with my whole heart, Chris, if I may so call you still, and so speak to you—of bygones. When I go to South Africa I shall carry the thought of you along with me with a despairing ache, because I know that I have lost you for ever."

Chris looked down; tears came into her

eyes. She misunderstood him. She supposed that he was still referring to her conduct, and that he regarded it as forming an insuperable barrier between them, and that he was taking this opportunity of impressing the fact on her. Whereas, in his mind, his loss of title and fortune was predominant. With no expectations, and with only a moderate income, it was not possible for him to renew an engagement with a girl who had been nurtured in luxury, who mixed in the best society, and would make demands on her husband which he would be unable to meet.

"Yes," he went on, "what has occurred has made it impossible for us to think of standing towards each other in the old relation. That episode is a chapter torn out of the book of my life, leaving its ragged edges to show what has gone, and to disfigure and reduce the value of the whole volume."

"But," said Chris in a choking voice, "how is it that your uncle was married and you were left in the dark on a so important point?" She desired to divert the subject from her own affair, on which she supposed he harped.

"He was married, and, I suppose, ashamed of what he had done, so kept it a secret. Mr. Gallop satisfied himself that he was really married. He saw a certificated copy of the

register, and also that of the boy's birth, so that from the dream in which I had been basking I have had a rude awakening. It is at an end with me as far as fortune and title go. Now I must look to doing my best in the field, and, perhaps—God knows—may earn a name there. That is my only hope. You forgive me, Miss Lavenham?"

"Yes," she said slowly and somewhat reluctantly, "but you have not said that you regard me as entirely blameless in that hunt affair."

He remained silent. Presently he replied, "I am not your judge. You refused to allow me to act as such the other day, and will you force me into the seat to-day?"

"It is not only a woman, convinced against her will, is of the same opinion still," said Chris, in a tone of annoyance.

"We remain friends, nothing more," said he sadly. "Well, good-bye." He held out his hand. "Your train is in."

She put her fingers to his. His face was careworn, and she felt her heart soften to him, but she would not show it—he persisted so unnecessarily in asserting that all was over between them. He had not forgiven her, whatever he might say, even were she to force him to say it. She was offended with him,

though she loved him, perhaps the more deeply offended because she loved him so truly. But now he was leaving—possibly for ever, to run the risk of enteric fever, Boer treachery, or a bullet in his heart in open fight.

"We may never meet again," he said.

"Or meet in different circumstances," she said, swallowing her tears. "God be with you, Roger. You shall have my prayers."

He carried her wraps to the carriage, and in a few minutes they were parted.

She knew Roger Fenton, as she considered, thoroughly. He was a true and honourable man, over-sensitive, touchy accordingly, and now inordinately depressed.

In her opinion, with his high sense of woman's dignity he was tortured with annoyance at the accident that had happened, and which he magnified extravagantly. It was this that weighed him down, not the disappointment over the baronetcy; that, to her mind, was nothing. She looked at these things through a girl's eyes.

"Poor Roger," she said to herself; "the bracing air of the veldt, the change of scene, the occupation of his mind over military affairs, will enable him to review my conduct with saner eyes."

On the other hand, Captain Fenton thought, as he walked to his lodgings, "A girl such as that would not consent to live on my slender means. It is no use thinking of it. It is one thing to accept a man with a prospect of a title and a first position in his county, and another to mate with one who is nobody, and to subside to live hanging on to the skirts of gentility in a suburban villa. If she had not broken the engagement before, I should have been bound to release her now. My only chance of recovering her is to distinguish myself in South Africa, and gain rapid promotion. I have brains and pluck. Then—then when I return we will see—we shall meet under very different circumstances."

CHAPTER X

AUNT BABS

"Well, niece, I hope to see you one day fitted with a husband."
Much Ado About Nothing, Act ii. Scene 1.

LADY Barbara Fitzwarden lived in a flat in Cumberland Mansions, Westminster. She would have preferred a more aristocratic neighbourhood and a house to herself, but her means were insufficient for that indulgence, and her annuity was not paid with that punctuality which would enable her to live as she liked.

She ascended to her flat in a lift, and this was a nuisance to her. The atmosphere of the case was not to her taste, and the descent in it from her apartments gave her qualms.

She resembled her sister Laura not in face only, but also morally. She was considerably the elder of the two, but she was reluctant to admit it. The lift and her brother, the Earl of Tullymore, were the objects on which she vented her spleen. She felt herself a prisoner, when she could only leave her rooms by means

of the cage that ascended and descended at the summons of an electric bell, and that she was condemned to make use of one was attributable to the *mauvais sujet*, Tullymore, who, if he had been all that is expected of a brother and the head of the house of Fitzwarden, should have seen that his eldest sister, who had been the guide of his youth, should be housed better, and more in accordance with her social position.

She was a small lady, her fingers somewhat distorted with rheumatic chalkstones, and was engaged in persistent war against the advance of age, and in disguising its ravages by various expedients and subterfuges.

"My dear," said Lady Barbara to her niece on her arrival, "you see how I am situated, I cannot even have a manservant. And there is a vulgar stock-jobber in the flat below me keeps his carriage, his butler, and coachman."

"Surely, aunt, it is a distinction to be not even as is this stock-jobber, and to occupy a higher level—as is consistent with your rank."

"There is a comfort in that, and you put it nicely. It cannot be helped, I suppose. That unprincipled Land League has set the peasants on our estates against paying their rents, and

the rents are cut down unconscionably by the Land Courts. That is how Tullymore is pleased to represent it. He is good for nothing, and lounges and loafs in Paris. Heaven knows, or the other place does, how he lives, I don't, and I don't want to know. What is that I have heard from Laura—that you are engaged to a baronet with a long rent roll? That's good."

"No, Aunt Babs, it is off between us. He is not a baronet. His uncle married and had a son, and so poor Roger Fenton is left out in the cold."

"So you broke it off, and quite right too. We want no more paupers in the family. We have already enough lackpennies and lacklands in it already. I will see what I can do for you. Though I am pinched, I still keep in touch with those of my own class. But I fear—let me look at you. Stand in the light. Ah! you have good eyes and a well-shaped head and fine hair, but your complexion will tell only by night. You will have to dress well. I am a judge in that. As for Laura, she is an incapable. She spends a fortune on frocks and is always a guy. She never had taste, never, even as a child—she dressed her dolls abominably. Taste in dress is a gift, my dear. A poet is born, and not made, and so is a stylish

woman. Unless you have style you might as well never have been born—I mean in the upper class of life. You can bear a good deal of dress, it will tell on you. What is a veal cutlet without a little paper frill and nicely mashed potatoes? We must do our utmost to make you attractive, and draw off attention from your nose and mouth, which are not all that one would wish. You will have to practise with your eyes to make the most of them, but for Heaven's sake do not overdo it—that would be fatal, and it is a trap into which girls with good eyes are liable to fall, without someone with discretion, like myself, to advise in such a matter. I am afraid in our sphere there are not many desirable *parti* to whom I could introduce you. Young men look out for money. If that fails, there will be no help for it but to descend a step."

"My dear aunt, I really have no wish——"

"Oh, fiddlesticks! you must. Leave the conduct of the matter to me. I intend introducing you at Court, unless Lady Brendon will take care of that. I wish the Drawing Rooms were not by day, you do not show to advantage then. But now, to change the topic. How long do you propose to stay with me—a fortnight?"

"Aunt, if you can possibly bear with me a little longer time, I shall be thankful. Aunt Laura does not desire to have me back at Longridge just yet; she has her reasons."

"So much the better. Only you see how straitened I am in my circumstances. I cannot go out when I will. I do not keep a carriage, but I hire a respectable brougham, and there is a man in livery who goes with it, and really serves passably as a private servant. But it comes expensive, and I shall feel it my duty to take you out a good deal to concerts and dinners and balls. I intend to marry you off and wash my hands of you before the winter is over. My finances are not what they should be, on account of the Land League and Tullymore. So—we shall have to come to some little arrangement between us, say two guineas a week. I know that you have a hundred and fifty. What is over you must spend on dress, and you will, of course, share the expenses of the carriage with me. Dress you must. I am not going to have you trot about with me as a dowdy. What may do at Barnford will not do here. What Laura will consider suitable I do not."

"But," expostulated Chris, feeling very uneasy, "what am I to do? Aunt Laura said that

she calculated on still receiving what I have been accustomed to contribute towards the expenses of Longridge."

"Stuff and nonsense! If you are with her, right and proper; if with me, you help me. That is Laura all over, grasping and insatiable. She is really well off; she has her pension, whereas I am dependent on my annuity. But Laura was like that as a child, she put all her pennies in a box, and only took them out to buy some trashy bits of finery that made her look ridiculous. She spent every coin on herself, and spent it badly. Would I live in a flat and go up and down, to and from it in a meat-safe if I were not constrained to do so by circumstances? Now, dear Chris, it is time for you to dress for dinner, and I shall be curious to see how you turn out. Admiral Sir John Chandos lives on the shelf above this, and he usually dines with me. He is an old man and rather deaf, so you must pitch your voice high that he may hear you. But you must not let him suppose that you are shouting, or he will be offended. Pitch in the voice is everything, not volume. He plays cribbage with me in the evening. He supplies the wine, and his valet waits at dinner—a convenience to us both. He is well off and has no family—but inclined to be close. Of course, if I were a young girl

this would never do. But I am out of my teens, and the breath of scandal cannot touch me. Not that I am so old as Laura tries to make out. She is not well preserved. There is nothing, there is nothing like face-massage for getting the incipient wrinkles away, and wrinkles, Christine, come from care and pecuniary worries, far more than from years. I admit that I am older than Laura, but not by so much as she would like to make out. I have taken on companions, but they irritate me and I will have no more. But for this admiral I should find it tedious in the evenings, and I daresay he would be dull by himself. As you may judge, I was once a beautiful woman, far more so than Laura. I have had a hundred offers to Laura's one. But I was attached to a certain Marquess. I won't name him, for he is now married, but he was very fond of me. Tullymore stood in our way and spoiled both of our lives. The Marquess's family did not relish an alliance with ours because of Tullymore. They thought he would be incessantly borrowing money, and that there would be no shaking him off. But he never got over his attachment to me. He and his wife do not get on well together, he is always thinking of me. You will see Sir John Chandos almost every evening, dining here."

"Oh, aunt, I suppose it is my duty to tell you that it is something of this sort that has made Aunt Laura send me to you."

"Something of what sort?"

"Dining alone with a young gentleman."

"Never, Chris; who was he?"

"A young surgeon, a Mr. Bates."

"A surgeon! Phew! How was that?"

"After a hunt. I could not get back, as my horse was dead beat; and it was a little inn, sixteen miles from Barnford."

"Merciful powers! Tell me all about it."

Christine narrated the circumstances, and was interrupted repeatedly by the old lady, who threw in remarks and cast up ejaculations.

"This won't do, Chris. It won't do at all. I shall have to marry you off as quickly as I can. You are too fast. Mark my words. Men will chaff, dance, eat and drink, and smoke with emancipated damsels. They will flirt with them—but marry them, never. You cast overboard every chance when you put on the cap of liberty, and will spend an old age in vain regrets. Phew! Happily Barnford is out of the civilised world, and the story may never reach town. They put a bed of sawdust and concrete between the floors of these flats, to prevent those above hearing what goes on below, and it is so to some extent between the

social floors. The rumour may never ascend here. But I must marry you. I daresay I could manage Sir John Chandos for you. He is deaf, and that opens rare chances to you. I knew a lady that was hard of hearing, and she got married to a parson by that very means. The clergyman called, and said, 'Fine weather to-day, ma'm,' and she immediately replied, 'My father is dead, so I cannot say ask papa, but I accept your flattering offer.' The poor fellow being nervous, and afraid of figuring in a case of breach of promise of marriage, actually submitted, and was married to her."

"But, my dear aunt, I have no wish to be married."

"You are over twenty, and now every six months tells. There is no time to be lost. If you do not care for an old man, take one who is young, but we must not be squeamish. There is a Bounder, the son of the stock-jobber. I don't know him, but I could contrive an introduction. The family are panting to know me and Sir John, and would grovel on all-fours to get taken up into our set. I suppose they could be screwed into a corner of the Peerage if the Bounder married you. Why! for them to be able to talk familiarly of Tullymore, and of the Earl and Countess of Brendon, as kinsfolk, and of Lady Laura

Demant, and Lady Barbara Fitzwarden—for the sake of that they would make the most liberal settlement. I will negotiate it. If it comes off, of course, you will remember me, and that it was my doing. We will talk of this another time. You must dress now. There goes the first bell."

CHAPTER XI

MY FRIEND BOUTFLOWER

"I wonder that you will be talking—nobody marks you."
Much Ado About Nothing, Act i. Scene 1.

SIR John Chandos was a fine old man, erect, with a bronzed face, and grey hair that was waved above his temples, rippled as if crimped, possibly had been so. He had grey, short whiskers, but was otherwise smooth-shaven, with the gloss on his chin of recent subjection to the lather-brush and the razor. He had darkish eyes, and a look in them of a man born to command, but softened with a kindly light. There was none of the looseness of a nautical build about him. Miss Lavenham was introduced to him, and he saluted her with a stately bow.

Her aunt was pleased with her appearance; her evening dress was simple, pink, but well-fitting, and a few flowers were in her dark hair and bosom. She looked pretty, perhaps even striking. Her full, beautiful eyes redeemed whatever was amiss in the rest of her face.

Indeed, anyone looking into them forgot mouth and nose, and saw only the splendour of those lustrous eyes, in which burned intelligence. The nose was somewhat *retroussé*, and the mouth over large. She was tall, gracefully built, and had a beautifully shaped head and neck.

Sir John said, "I dine frequently with your aunt—we are very old friends. I am a venerable bachelor, and she has never found a man worthy of her. As it would be dull to take our meals each in silence and alone on our several flats, we have settled it thus by mutual consent. I might go to my club, but they say there I am growing old. I do not admit it—the fashion now is to speak in an undertone. It is all affectation, like the shaking of hands. I cannot hear the babble that goes on, mine are old-fashioned ears, and my friends are impatient because I cannot accommodate myself to the new-fangled style of talk. So I am best here, where I can hear every word spoken by Lady Barbara, whose voice has the ring of perpetual youth. Your aunt most kindly admits me to her table, and, I must say, she keeps an excellent cook."

"Sir John" (pronouncing his name in the old-fashioned way, like "surgeon"), Lady Barbara said, "you flatter me. I have not

the means to afford a chef. But where there is a will to be pleased, defects are overlooked."

"Not at all. I am a bit of a judge. And as to chefs, I don't believe in them. I have dined at most of the big hotels on the Continent, and am weary of their exploits. To be sure, in Paris you go to Durand's, or Le Grand Resort, and there you get an excellent dinner; but away from the capital what is given you? The same everywhere in tedious iteration. I remember les frères Provens, in the Café Royal—but it is no more, and nowhere do you now get dinners as were served there. I know the hackneyed menu. Soup without flavour. Civet de Lièvre at this season; ever the hateful gigot and the tough rosbif, veal piqué, and a passable vol au vent. But here——"

"Here the seasoning is always the same," said Lady Barbara. "There is rosemary, that's for remembrance; and there are pansies, that's for thoughts. There's rue for you, and here's some for me; we may call it herb-grace o' Sundays."

"A seasoning that never palls," said the old man. "Miss Lavenham, I can hear every word your cousin says, and she does not raise her voice."

"Aunt," corrected Lady Barbara.

"I should not have believed it," said the Admiral. "Allow me one arm for each of you. Dinner is served."

When they had taken their places at table, Chris was placed at the side, between the Admiral and her aunt.

"You need not listen to him," said Lady Barbara, "I never do. He is interminable as a talker. There is no getting in a word edgeways."

"As to fish," said Sir John, "fish is not fit to be eaten out of London. Everywhere else, dead and flat. I never touch it in France or Germany. At Munich, at Vienna, I have had turbot and sole brought in water-tanks by train from the Baltic or the Atlantic, and the poor creatures were a mass of bruises—unfit for food. The fresh-water fish most commonly served is grayling, utterly insipid."

"We sometimes have our little parties here," threw in Lady Barbara, regardless of the old man's prosing. "He asks in a chum or two of his, and I invite some of my lady friends, and we sit down to a rubber. Bless the man, he is talking still."

"I have been in Perigord," continued Sir John Chandos, "and the sole idea of seasoning there is truffles. Truffles in the soup, in the meat, in the mayonnaise, in the mashed pota-

toes—till you loathe them as the Israelites did the quails."

"That dress becomes you, Chris," from the other end of the table. "Who made it? Your taste, doubtless, and not that of Laura."

"Nothing local anywhere. The same at Rome, in Berlin, at Constantinople, and Madrid. On one occasion my friend Boutflower——"

"Now he has started Boutflower," said Aunt Babs, "we shall have a string of reminiscences."

"But who was Mr. Boutflower?" asked Christine of the Admiral.

"Captain Boutflower! Boutflower! a capital fellow, excellent company, one of the most genial companions possible. He could turn his hand to anything—an Admirable Crichton."

"Shall I have the pleasure of an introduction?"

"Alas!" the old gentleman sighed; "he has joined the majority. He was the warmest and truest of friends. Curious how shortlived my friends are! His was a piteous case. He ought to have been alive now; the cheeriest, most sanguine of men; but there are some things will break the heart of the most hopeful. Everyone liked him; but he went down

through no fault of his own. He was crushed by an imprudent marriage."

"How sad!" said Chris sympathetically. "But do tell me about Captain Boutflower."

"Let him prose on," whispered Lady Barbara. "And pay attention to me. Now he is on the topic of his friend, he will run on till he runs down. Say an 'Indeed,' and 'Really,' and 'How interesting!' just to keep him going."

So Christine had to lend one ear to her aunt, and the other to the Admiral. Happily, the brain consists of two halves, so that each lobe can follow a separate train of thought simultaneously.

Notwithstanding this structural advantage, Chris was unable to fully follow the continuous and conflicting currents of talk between which she sat, and which met in her brain; for she was constrained alternately to address remarks to each speaker, showing some appreciation of what was being said.

She heard that Boutflower, "one of the finest sailors in Her Majesty's Navy," on one occasion in the Mediterranean had contrived a bisque soup without any prawns as basis, but how this was done she did not catch, as her attention was drawn off by her aunt, who informed her that when the æsthetic craze was

on, her aunt Laura had adopted a Kate Greenaway bonnet, and a long dress, straight down with short body—"and with her figure, too!" which made her supremely ridiculous.

Then she learned how Boutflower had played a practical joke on some ladies in whose company he had ascended Vesuvius, by producing some fried fish out of the crater, as evidence of a communication between the ocean and the reservoir of central fires. But how he managed to smuggle up the fish she was unable to understand, as her mind was caught away by Lady Barbara, held in fast grip, till she had described to Chris the gown she had worn at a certain Drawing Room, and had told what it had cost her, and how many comforts she had been obliged to forego to meet the expenditure.

Next a good story reached her right ear, touching the way in which Boutflower had overreached a Cingalese dealer in sham jewellery at Colombo, who was attempting to pass off to him a chain of false aqua-marine. But the point of the anecdote was broken by a communication poured into her left ear, relative to the misdoings of Tullymore, who had neglected to pay the annuity due to his sister, and had been brought to book only by the threat of legal proceedings.

The dinner came to an end at last, and the ladies retired.

"He does not relish being long alone," said Lady Barbara. "He must be talking, and he has you now to receive his tedious stories."

On reaching the drawing-room Aunt Babs excused herself. She had to make some arrangement with her maid about a dress she purposed wearing on the morrow.

Whilst she was out of the room Admiral Sir John Chandos entered. Christine motioned to him to seat himself beside her on the sofa.

"Now, Sir John," she said, "tell me about Captain Boutflower, and what is sad in his story."

"As good-hearted a fellow as I ever met," said the old man, rejoiced to have the girl all to himself as a listener, "and so handsome. He was always cheerful, although, Heaven knows, he had much to try him. His wife was a selfish, unprincipled woman, with no more brain than a peacock, and with all a peacock's vanity. She spoiled their only child, a boy, and neglected his education. Boutflower always sent home a liberal share of his pay, with strict injunctions that the lad should be put in a good school; but the woman spent the money on herself, and let the boy run wild. When Boutflower returned to England, he was

very indignant, and sent the lad to school. Then he was posted on the China Station, and no sooner was he gone than she took her son away, and he grew up ignorant, self-indulgent, and undisciplined. On Boutflower's return he was already sprung up to manhood. He put his son in an office, but he was dismissed thence as useless. Then he furnished him with money, and sent him to Australia to try his luck at sheep farming. However, he returned by the next boat—and the money was spent. I believe that finally he did something disgraceful, and it broke my friend's heart—a man the soul of honour. I do not know the particulars. I had not the courage to inquire. When I saw Boutflower he had softening of the brain, brought on by worry over that young fellow. He was a pitiable object. He took my hand, and put the other to his throat; there was a lump there; he had had a stroke, and could not speak, but he looked at me and cried like a child. I am not ashamed to confess to you that the tears filled my eyes to see so good a man and so true a friend reduced to a poor wreck. He was such a splendid fellow. He could draw and paint, and he played the violin to perfection. He was an admirable mechanician, and a first-rate naval officer. And there he was—imbecile and weeping—the end of all,

brought about by a woman's folly and a son who was a shame to him. At length he died, and I really was not sorry for that. I attended his funeral, and, by Jove! will you believe me, his son got drunk on the occasion."

"What became eventually of the son?"

"I don't know. I do not want to know. He killed the best man that ever breathed—a man who would have sacrificed himself to do his duty. But do not talk of him any more. He makes my gorge rise."

The old Admiral was silent. His lips quivered.

Presently he said, "We will change the subject. And, by the way, I want to give you a word of caution. Your aunt is a fine woman, an excellent woman; I esteem her most highly. But do not build on her promises. I suppose she has undertaken to present you at Court?"

"Yes, Sir John."

"She will not do it. She cannot afford it, but she likes to suppose that she will, and to talk about it. And she has undertaken, I doubt not, to conduct you to entertainments of all kinds—balls, routs, the opera."

"Something of the kind."

"She will take you nowhere. She has not the money, and at her age she cannot stand

the strain. However, I will see that you go to the opera; I will get you and her a box."

"How kind of you!"

"Not at all—but hush! here she comes. Remember my words."

"What!" said Lady Barbara, entering, "Boutflower again?"

"Yes," answered Chris. "To the end of his sad tale in—where was it? Kensal Green?"

"Is it the end?" asked the Admiral, musingly. "Whilst that son lives—the story has its supplement."

CHAPTER XII

FROM WEST TO EAST

"Here's a maze trod, indeed,
Through forthrights and meanders! by your patience,
I needs must rest me." *Tempest*, Act iii. Scene 3.

AFTER a fortnight spent in Cumberland Mansions, Christine became somewhat weary of the life she was leading, and learned to understand her aunt's objections to the lift.

She felt herself boxed in, and that with an old lady who was exacting, an inveterate talker, demanding all her attention, and a good deal of service. This was not all. Lady Barbara took her out for drives, in the hired brougham she had spoken of, to call on her friends, old ladies, widows, and withered spinsters, whose conversation was even less interesting than that of her aunt. And Aunt Barbara frequently forgot to take her purse with her, or was without change, and was therefore borrowing repeatedly of Chris, and never recalling the debt.

If it had not been for that lift, Christine might have slipped out unobserved for a stroll

by herself, but if she did descend by that contrivance, her aunt soon found it out and lay in wait for her return. Lady Babs had inquired of the boy who worked the machine when Miss Lavenham had gone out, and then had wanted to know where she had been, and why she had left her alone for so long a time.

Sir John Chandos had been as good as his word. He took the two ladies to the opera, with the result that Lady Barbara was too tired next day to rise till lunch-time, and was peevish. In the afternoon she was indisposed to go out, and for a marvel, did not seem inclined to talk.

Accordingly, Christine thought that the opportunity had come for which she had been looking, when she might call on her cousin Martha, the daughter of her father's brother, who had a vicarage in the East of London.

She examined the map, for she had never been east of the Mansion House, and her acquaintance with the City and all that lay towards the sun-rising from it was little or nothing.

Regent Street she knew and Bond Street, also Oxford Street and the Parks, but little beyond these thoroughfares and open spaces. However, after an attentive study of the map she trusted to be able to find her way.

She did not relish the notion of taking it with

her, and standing at a corner unfolding it, consequently she jotted on a card the names and directions of the streets and turnings she should take, and trusted, with the aid of her card, without much difficulty to find the way to St. Mark's Parsonage, Buluwayo Place.

She entered an omnibus that conveyed her to the Royal Exchange, and there she got out. She struck towards Bishopsgate Street without difficulty, through Threadneedle Street, and got into the main thoroughfare which she crossed by Crosby Hall. She pursued her course for a while along Bishopsgate Street and then struck east, to find speedily that her troubles had begun, and that her card failed her.

She was in a world new to her, and it looked like the off-scourings of an old world, consisting of mean and shabby houses, of a tangle of sordid streets, along which rambled people as shabby and sordid as their surroundings. Nothing was bright and attractive save the gin palace with its vulgar glitter. Here stood up the vast bulk of a Model Lodging House with its iron balconies swarming with dingy children, as though infested with parasites. Cords forming a lacework in these balconies supported drooping linen that had been washed, but could never be whitened, and was patched or tattered. A few men leaned over the railings,

with folded arms, smoking. But the vast mass of the houses was one of small habitations run up of brick with narrow doors and dull-eyed windows, some three stories high, pinched one against the other to keep in their warmth.

The atmosphere was not the same as west of St. Paul's, the sounds that met her ears, the faces she encountered, were quite different from what were familiar to her.

She passed under a huge factory with dull, hard walls, behind which was the thrill of machinery, and above rolled volumes of black smoke from a tall chimney.

Then she entered a thoroughfare, but saw neither cab nor hansom in it, only a brewer's dray laden with casks, and costermongers wheeling their barrows. There was a stall where winkles and whelks were sold, and children crowded about it, picking the winkles out with pins—and throwing the shells when empty into the gutter. The shops made no pretence to be attractive. At the greengrocers' the vegetables had a stale appearance; the oranges were puffed as though they had been rolled in a sack to increase their size. There was a dirty shop, the window plastered with ballads that had clung to the glass till they were yellow; an old clothes vendor with a Jewish jowl and garments that never could have been

made to fit him, stood in his door. Two or three doors away was a second-hand clothes shop. The window displayed every article of feminine attire. At one end of the window was a row of white kid shoes, very soiled, flanked by several pairs of bronze-coloured leather boots. Above the line of shoes was a dirty card, on which was scrawled "Wedding outfits provided." A mangy-looking cat found in the interior of a magenta-ribboned hat the peace denied her in the streets, while her kitten alternately played with the ostrich feather of another hat, and stared in surprise at a dirty little girl, who, standing at the front of the window, called to a friend, "I sye, Emily Jine, come 'ere and look at this 'ere kitting." A lively trade was carried on at the next shop by a seller of herrings and fried fish, and the purchasers, children and women, carried off the fried fish in scraps of soiled and crumped newspaper. A low music-hall ensued, with a notice outside that Roaring Billy would that evening sing a new and laughable song; and Lucy Toll would turn somersaults as a living wheel, carrying a lighted candle all the while in her mouth. Next a beerhouse, in which girls and men were shouting and laughing and romping. A menagerie of cats and dogs and birds in cages outside a dealer's in live pets, and where parrots

screamed and uttered profane language, and children looking on laughed. Chris turned from this thoroughfare, and was speedily lost in a maze of small back streets.

She looked up at the houses; however much lashed by the rain, they were never washed—the dirt had eaten into the brick, and nothing but fire would get it out.

She might as well have thrown away her card, of so little service was it now. She presently found herself in a foul, narrow street. A group of boisterous girls was in the midst, engaged in loud altercation with a couple of elderly women, who were screaming abuse at them, and were answered with defiant shrieks, whilst others standing by yelled advice or encouragement. Children, repulsive on account of their dirt, with clotted dull hair, played in the gutter, regardless of the altercation, for with such scenes and sounds they were familiar. They made pellets of sodden cabbage leaves to throw at each other, or rolled one another in the mire, romping or fighting.

Chris stood still.

She would fain have asked her way, but could not venture into the broil, nor distinguish anyone sufficiently respectable for her to address with the chance of a courteous reply.

Police were few in these parts apparently. She had not seen one for some time.

She hesitated for a moment what to do, and then resolved on passing the quarrelling women and girls, and make for the head of the street.

As she pressed forward the young people noticed her, and a look of intelligence flew from one eye to another. Something was whispered, and in another moment she was surrounded, hustled, struck, thrown from one girl to another, turned about, amid jeers, oaths, and blasphemies; her hat was knocked off her head, and she was struck in the face, for the moment blinding and partially stunning her. When she came to herself the gang had dispersed, disappeared down passages and through doors. Also, singularly enough, simultaneously almost all the elder women vanished as well. Heads that had projected from the windows were withdrawn, and the sashes lowered, women standing in their doorways felt an immediate need for hastening into their own apartments. This, however, Christine was too dazed to observe. She felt as though she must fall, and to prevent this caught at a lamp-post and clung to it. She put her hands to her face, tingling from the blow. A sense of sickness came over her, and a mist swam before her eyes.

Next moment she would have fainted had

not a hand caught her, and a voice said, "Hev they 'urt you, miss? Things 'ave gone too far, the blackguardesses."

Christine rallied and looked at the person who spoke to her. This was a sturdy wench in a ragged cotton gown, with a fringe over her eyes, and a tortoise-shell comb in her matted hair. A look of good nature shone through the grime of her face, and she spoke in kindly tones.

"Bust me!" exclaimed the girl, "it was a shime. But wot else can yer expect in Queer Street of a Saturdye?"

Chris gazed at her with lack-lustre eyes. She was not seriously injured, but bewildered and frightened.

"Come 'ere, then," said the girl; "blow me tight if I don't bring you into our 'ouse. I can sit you on a cheer there till you pull round." Then she added, "If you will 'and me fourpence I'll run round the corner for a drop o' gin."

"Oh no, no!" gasped Chris, with a shiver; "not that, please; but I should like to sit down for a minute."

"'Ere you are; ground-floorers we are. There's nobody in but my brother Cecil. And, poor devil, 'e won't 'urt you, though 'e 'ad a

mind once to blow up all London, and would 'a done it but for 'is canary."

She took hold of Christine's arm, thrust her own through it, and drew her towards the house in which she lived, No. 8.

Christine was too confused, too greatly alarmed, to know clearly what she was doing.

The girl led her through a doorway, down a dark passage, threw open a side door in the rear, and thrusting Christine in said—

"There now, sit you down. This here cheer 'ave four legs. I'll run for some gin, if you will."

Chris shook her head. "Only let me get my breath," she said, "that I may thank you for your kindness."

CHAPTER XIII

IN QUEER STREET

"Much better than I was. I can stand and walk: I will even take my leave of you and pace softly to my kinsman's."

The Winter's Tale, Act iv. Scene 2.

WHEN Chris was sufficiently recovered she was able to look about her. The room was at the back of the house, and gave on to a little yard with a high brick wall beyond that cut off all prospect, and allowed but little light to enter. Only the canary in a cage that swung there by straining its neck could get a glimpse of sky. What light was available was somewhat obscured by the dirt that adhered to the panes, one of which was broken and patched with a bunch of rag. The floor was indescribably filthy; the walls, unpapered, were splashed and smeared. The ceiling was discoloured by gas, especially over the burner that was attached to an iron tube descending from the ceiling. In the corners sagged cobwebs charged with grime.

The only attempt at decoration consisted in a representation of a particularly revolting

murder from the *Police News* that was affixed to one of the walls.

Against one side of the room was a plain table; the sole chair that was available for Chris was that on which she sat. In the grate burned no fire, and by this sat a lanky youth with bright eyes and hectic colour on his cheek-bones, coughing and hacking. He extended his lean fingers towards the empty grate, and then rubbed them together. To keep himself warm he had drawn over his shoulders a foul blanket from one of the beds that occupied a side of the apartment. In the corner was heaped a bushel of coals, and by it were a frying-pan, a battered kettle, and some other cooking implements, in no order and uncleaned. On the window-shelf lay four slabs of bacon, a bit of paper was below them, but none above.

The atmosphere was close and dead.

"Look 'ere," said the girl, "you've got a tidy 'it in the face, and there'll be a fine bruise. Let me cut off a bit o' the bacon as big as a nut, of the fatty part, and rub your cheek with it. That's famous against black eyes."

"Thank you, you are most kind; but when I get home I will put on some Vinolia cream. Is this your only room?"

"Yes, we don't want no more. There's only

father and mother and brother Cecil and me. 'Tain't as if we were a large family."

"Your brother looks unwell."

"He is that. He's 'ad this 'ere 'acking cough on 'im for nigh on two months, and don't seem to shike it off. But when the spring comes he'll pull round right enough."

"I hope so," said Chris, but without assurance. It appeared to her that the young man was in a decline. "Why do you not send him to the hospital?"

"Oh, the 'orspital; that's fine! They won't take in such as he. He ain't got no bones broke."

"I think he would be more comfortable with a pocket-handkerchief."

"Where's the money to come from for nose-wipes? He'd want two a week, and money is dear. What we 'ave we wants for bacon and 'errings, don't we, Cecil?"

The youth nodded, "Ay, we do, Brice."

"Look at 'im," said his sister. "Ee's a bloomin' anarchist 'ee is. And, you'd 'ardly believe me, but he with his pals would 'ave set fire to London. They'd a mind to it and 'ave a done it but for an 'itch."

"Why should you wish to burn London?" asked Christine, much astonished.

"Why?" retorted the young man, "because the rich is rich, and the poor is poor."

"That cannot be helped."

"Ay—tho!—I'd burn the rich out of their 'ouses, all bedizened with pictures and muslin and plush curtains, and"—his acquaintance with the contents of a comfortable house being limited, he added—"and their ormolu clocks."

"But you would burn out the poor as well."

"What odds of that! Their 'ouses is no loss to them. Look about you. There ain't nothing to leave 'ere and call over it 'ome sweet 'ome. Who would care to be turned out of this? But we'd 'ave set down the rich a good many pegs, losin' their decanters and their ormolu clocks."

"Well," said Christine, with a sigh of relief, "it is a consolation to know that you did not do it."

"No," threw in the girl Brice, "he was afride of burning his canary."

"Not that altogether," said the youth, ashamed at being shown on so weak a side. "You see, I was to draw out the plans, and jot down all the points as was to be fired. It was to be in an 'undred places at once. Fifty wouldn't a' done no ways. London is so wopping big. But there was the 'itch. I tore up the plans and nothin' came of it. It would 'ave 'ad too many in the game, and who could say but there wouldn't 'ave been a black sheep

among an 'undred, and we should all 'ave been caught."

"But—are you an Anarchist still?"

"I can't go to the meetings, with this 'ere cough—and so I'm dropped out of the s'ciety."

"You would not have minded burning your father and mother and sister?"

"As to father—I don't care a snap for he; and as to mother, she ain't no mother o' mine. As to Brice—she could look after 'erself, any dye."

The sister looked admiringly at her brother, and then with a glance of triumph at Christine. Far from reprobating her brother for being associated in such atrocious schemes, she regarded him as a hero. In the class to which she belonged there is romance of only one sort, and that is the romance of crime. The romance of the merry green-wood, of the tumbling sea, of the yellow harvest field, of the Christmas faggot, of the purple heather—of innocent love, are not—only the romance that reeks of blood.

There was a grandness in the conception of all London in flames that appealed to the imagination, and invested him who had schemed it with a lurid halo.

"I am surprised your conscience allowed you to go into such a plot," said Chris.

"Conscience! I ain't got none."

"Have you no fear of God before your eyes?"

"God! there ain't none, never was and never will be."

Christine thought fit to change the topic. She inquired, "Are your father and mother at work?"

Brice laughed. "Father don't work. He harn't need to."

"But how do you live, then?"

"Well—I earns something," answered the girl; "and so did Cecil till he got that there cough. As to father he's got his little 'lowance and 'ee spends most of it, and mother Gogs 'elps 'im. But I make 'im give me up the rent money, and the rest he swallows. So we scratch along somehow. I can earn enough for fried fish and ale."

"We ain't got no mother," observed the boy. "Our mother went off with a bloke long time ago, and father took up with another, old Gogs, that's about it; and they drinks all Brice lets 'em 'ave out of the 'lowance."

"How cruel of your mother deserting you!" exclaimed Chris.

"I don't know that. She'd a right to please 'erself. If she thought she could better 'erself, why not?"

"But her duty towards you!"

"Duty!" sneered the youth. "There ain't such a thing as duty. Everyone for himself. Look 'ere, Brice, can't you give me a bit of fire now. I'm shiverin' all down my marrow bones."

"I'll light one presently and do you a 'sojer' (red herring)."

"Well," said Christine, rising, "I must go my way. I thank you very much for having been so courteous and kind as to let me rest here—for, indeed, I needed it."

She felt in her pocket—and suddenly fired to her temples. She could not find her purse. Next she felt for the watch where it was generally placed. That also was gone.

"Oh dear!" she gasped; "I have been robbed. I have lost my money and my watch."

"Well," said Brice composedly, "I supposed you'd a' knowed that already. What else could you look for, comin' into Queer Street, of a Saturday arternoon, when the gals was making 'oliday."

The youth burst into a hoarse guffaw, cut short by a fit of coughing.

"I am very sorry about my purse," said Christine, "for I wished to make you a present, so that your brother might have a little fire when he liked. But, oh! my watch! my watch!—it belonged to my dear mother who is

dead, and I would not have lost that for much —for more than I had in my purse. Which is the way to the nearest police-station?"

"What do you want to go there for?"

"To get the police to search for it."

Brice laughed. "Garn!" she said. "They won't help. The watch is spouted already, and the money divided. They may find the empty purse, if that's aught to you."

"Well, then, I must go on my way. Where is St. Mark's parsonage?"

"Never 'eard of it."

"But it must be somewhere near here. I want to see Miss Lavenham and the vicarage."

"Lavenham!" echoed the girl. "What do you know of Miss Lavenham?"

"She is my cousin—my name is Lavenham."

Brice whistled. "Strike me lucky!" she said. "I'd no notion of that. I know Miss Lavenham; she's a good un, tho' I don't belong to 'er club. If the gals 'ad known you was a cousin and called Lavenham, they'd never a' meddled wi' you. The church is in Buluwayo Place. You go up Queer Street, then one turn down Paradise Alley, and up Lucy Lane at the corner—and you'll come out in Buluwayo Place. But I'll go with you. Cecil, you can light the fire for yourself. I'm going with the lidy to tike 'er to our Miss Lavenham."

CHAPTER XIV

IN BULUWAYO PLACE

"All is uneven,
And everything is left at six and seven."
Richard II., Act ii. Scene 2.

AFTER the girl Brice had conducted Christine to Buluwayo Place, she abruptly quitted her. She had not spoken on the way. Something was apparently working in her mind.

Chris was admitted into the drawing-room of the vicarage, and found her cousin Martha there, lying on a sofa. Martha Lavenham at once rose and welcomed her with tender affection. She was a tall girl, with a broad brow, intelligent eyes, and a sweet expression, such as is sometimes produced by pain, long and patiently endured. In feature she was plain enough.

"Excuse me if I lie down," she said; "I am under orders to do so. My back, which was never strong, has given way, and I have to lie on the sofa for many hours daily. But we can talk—there is no bar on the tongue."

"I will take a chair by you."

"What is the matter with your cheek, Chris?"

"I have received a blow. Is it very red? The story is not pleasant. I was hustled and robbed by some rowdy girls."

"Where?"

"In Queer Street."

"It has a bad name, and it is in my district. What made you choose that way, and on a Saturday, too?"

"I lost my direction."

"Is your purse gone?"

"Yes, with two sovereigns and some silver. I shall have to borrow some pence of you to take me back in a 'bus to Cumberland Mansions. But what is a more serious loss to me is my watch—I can ill spare that, as it belonged to my mother, and it cannot be replaced. However, I have made my experiences, and strange they have been. I have been offered a bit of fat bacon wherewith to rub my bruise, and a noggin of gin to pour down my throat."

"What—in Queer Street?"

"Yes, by a girl named Brice."

"Oh! Brice! I know her. She is not in my club. She is too rough and wayward. But with patience I trust to draw her in. She is by no means as savage and wild as were some of

the others, who are really now, like the man who dwelt in the tombs, clothed and in their right mind."

"What an odd name she has!"

"Brice, yes. We go out in flamboyant names in the East. She has a brother with the aristocratic name of Cecil, who is in a decline."

"I saw him. Really, Martha, the room they occupy—she, her brother, father, and mother—reeks with disease! It must be an inch deep in microbes of phthisis over the floor, and the cobwebs are like nets suspended to catch those that float in the air."

"No doubt. Brice will follow inevitably. There is no help for it. As to the old people, they are so sodden in gin that they can defy all sorts of bacilli."

"But—can nothing be done for the young man? Why not send him to one of the hospitals for consumptive patients."

"Oh! the A.P.C.! My father did apply by letter, and then followed that up, as the reply was unsatisfactory, by a personal interview with the secretary or manager. It was no good—no vacancy for two months."

"The mischief will then be irremediable."

"Yes—and then the hospital would receive him for six weeks only."

"Six weeks! He requires treatment for six months."

"Of course he does, but according to the rules of the A.P.C. patients are not allowed to remain longer."

"Why, that is simply to send them back to die."

"Naturally, but that is no concern of the Governors."

"What do you mean?"

"The Automatic Phthisis Cure Hospital is supported by voluntary contributions, and must show a satisfactory table of results. It does that. It can exhibit a list of the unfortunates who have passed through it, the more the better. It can affirm that during their residence in the hospital they have put on so many pounds weight, and can produce medical certificates as to general improvement. Then the patients return to their former condition of poverty, famine, and neglect, and die."

"But, Martha, what then is the advantage of the hospital?"

"It has great advantages. It maintains an army of paid nurses, a doctor and his assistant, a secretary, and an excellent cook and her staff. Then, over all, come those arch-blunderers, the Governors. I assure you the feeding is all that could be desired."

"Yes, I can understand that. But—what advantage to the consumptive patients?"

"A criminal before execution is, or was, allowed to order his dinner, and eat and drink to his heart's content the day previous to his ascending the gallows. It is something for these poor doomed beings to be allowed to have their fill of good food for six weeks previous to their despatch."

"But it does not answer the purpose for which it was instituted, which was, I assume, the curing of the consumptives, and not the maintenance of doctors and nurses and other officials, and feeding them as well on the fat of the land."

"What public institution does correspond with the purpose for which it was founded? Look at some of our missionary societies. A secretary cannot do the correspondence under a thousand a year, and the under-secretaries and organising secretaries, who throw the net and draw it throughout England, derive their hundreds of pounds out of the society. It is but the crumbs that fall from their well-spread table that goes to the missions abroad."

"These institutions should be overhauled, and started on a sounder principle."

"My dear Chris, there are but two masters in this world. If a work of charity is not under-

taken for the love of God, it must be done for the sake of a salary. The pity of it is, that where a penny is given to one, where the workers are not paid, and all is done out of devotion and pure zeal, to the other is given a sovereign."

Chris remained silent. The matter was beyond her. Presently she said, "To come to yourself, Martha, what really ails you?"

"General debility and weakness of the spine. I have to suck steel through a straw so as not to blacken my teeth, and to lie on my back half the day."

"You ought to go into the country. That would brace you up. I am certain that Aunt Laura would take you. Now that I am in town with Lady Barbara, she is without anyone, and she will welcome you."

"I cannot go now. I have my duties here."

"What duties?"

"To these wild girls. I have their club to manage. The work must be carried on. In the summer we close it, and then I am free and will take my holiday."

"But you will be killed before the summer comes. Get someone else to undertake the task for you."

"That is more easily suggested than accomplished. One of your West End ladies volunteered to help, and she came on a certain even-

ing, and told the girls that they ought to be very grateful to me for what I did for them."

"And so they ought to be."

"They should not be told so. They suppose that they run the club with their ha'pence, and that they must be allowed to think. Actually it costs a little struggle to keep it going, and that entails one of the only disagreeables connected with it—begging. You see, it is not a public institution, with patrons, and advertised, carried on by a committee, and issuing reports. Then another lady asked to see the work and help, but stipulated that she should not be brought into contact with the girls. That sufficed. No—there are plenty to gush over the sad condition of the East End, and London over the water, but few to lend a helping hand to effect a remedy. I recollect reading a passage in the *Greville Memoirs*, in which the writer put down his lucubrations over the brutalised and immoral condition of the poor in these parts, and the evil has grown by leaps and bounds since then. Nothing was done in over half a century to remedy the mischief, only now are men and women waking to the responsibility. But if we are to step between the living and the dead and stay the plague, it must be with the censer, and not the money-box."

"But the schools effect much."

"They sharpen the wits, but do nothing for the conscience. You see a result in Cecil, Brice's brother. We have to instil into the minds of the girls self-respect."

"Why should you not send them from these horrible surroundings into domestic service? There is an outcry now for servants."

"They are unaccustomed to and cannot endure restraint. They have been brought up to be free and do what they like, and go where they will. To such the discipline of a well-ordered home is intolerable; and you cannot turn young tigresses into tame cats in a day. I suppose it took centuries for the house-dog and ox to become domesticated. Here, from generation to generation, the young have lived an entirely wild life."

The door was opened, and the little maid-servant entering said, "If you please, miss, there is a girl outside wants to speak to the young lidy as is calling."

"Show her up here, Susie," said Martha.

Next moment Brice entered with flushed face.

"Here you are," she said, addressing Chris; "I've got your watch and the purse and the money for you—all but six bob and a tissey. The yellow boys are all right, every Jack of

'em. When the gals knew you were a Lavenham, and 'er cousin, they was sorry for what they 'ad done, and gave it me again—all but Polly Flinders, and she's an out-and-out bad un. She wouldn't listen to reason, though I laid my tongue on 'er scalding hot."

"Oh, I am so grateful!" gasped Chris, starting up to receive watch and purse. "The watch belonged to my mother, and she died six years ago. Oh, Brice, how can I thank you and the other girls sufficiently? But no, I will not take back the money. Go and let them have it again, and tell them they are welcome to it. I give it with a full heart."

"You're a thunderin' brick, you are."

"Brice," said Christine, "it is already dark, and the gas is lit. I might find my way to Queer Street, but I am not sure of my direction from thence. Will you guide me to Bishopsgate?"

"I'll do it. But fust I'll run and tell the gals. I'll wait for you outside our 'ouse. It's number eight—it is."

CHAPTER XV

FROM EAST TO WEST

"Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel;
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,
And show the heavens more just."
King Lear, Act iii. Scene 4.

WHEN Christine reappeared in Queer Street on her way back to Cumberland Mansions, she saw that there were as many persons there as when she had first made acquaintance with it, but there was not the same noise. Women were at their doors, girls were straggling about the street, or clustered in knots talking. As Chris passed, they looked at her in a half defiant, half suspicious manner. Brice had obviously distributed the money among the girls, and they did not understand the motive of the donor, and were distrustful of her purpose.

Brice was awaiting Christine.

"I must remember the number of your house," said the latter; "one dwelling is here so like another that I might make a mistake if I came this way again."

"Are you coming again to Queer Street?"

"Yes, I shall often visit my cousin, and if you will allow me, as I pass through, I will look in on you."

"I don't mind. But I ain't in till late at nights every dye but Saturday and Sunday."

"Is Polly Flinders here?"

"Yes—there. But you won't have her took up for it?"

"Of course not. Which is she?"

Brice pointed to a girl with a sullen face standing in a doorway. Christine at once stepped in her direction. Seeing which Polly turned her back, and would have darted within, had not she been prevented by a man and a woman coming out of the house she had to enter, and blocking the passage.

"Polly," said Christine, "do not be shy. I wish only to tell you that you are entirely welcome to the money. Let it be my present to you, and mind you buy a good bit of beef with it for your Sunday dinner."

The girl looked at her, said not a word of thanks, and dived between those who were issuing from the house, and disappeared up the staircase.

When Chris rejoined Brice, the latter said, "I hope you gave her the rough side of your tongue. She's a low creature."

"I told her to keep the six-and-six, she was welcome."

"You're a rum un!" ejaculated Brice. "But come along, you take my arm, and I'll elbow the way through for you. There's a lot of Jews about in Indigo Passage."

The girl conducted Christine through the maze of streets till they reached Bishopsgate.

"There you are," she said. "And good night to you."

"Before we part," said Christine, taking the girl's hand, "I want a word with you. The others have had some money from me—but you nothing."

"Don't want any. Git along with you."

"But your brother Cecil does. He needs comfort. Give him a fire whenever he requires one, do not stint the coal, and let me be pay-master. Besides, I wish greatly to bring him something that may do him good."

"Wot's that?"

"Cod-liver oil. It is not nice, but it will relieve his labouring lungs. You will allow me. It must be taken in wine."

"That's fine talking. Where's the wine to come from?"

"I will bring some along with the oil. You think you can induce him to take it?"

"'Tain't so many nice things we 'ave, that

'ee should turn up his nose at a little medicine."

"It is not exactly medicine, it is nourishing."

"Come to us, and welcome."

"Good-bye, Brice. I cannot tell you how deeply I feel your kindness. You have done me a service I shall never forget. I shall always regard you with high respect as a good girl."

"I ain't that by long chalks."

"Well!" she took both the girl's hands in hers, and pressed them. "Till we meet again."

On her return to Cumberland Mansions Christine found Lady Barbara much revived, and somewhat querulous over her protracted absence.

"My dear Chris," said she, "you really have been away an unconscionable time. Lady Brendon has been to call on you, and has left Brendon's card. She heard from Laura that you were here, and invites us to dine with her on Wednesday. Why, good gracious me! what have you done to your face?"

"I have met with an accident."

"I know," said the old lady. "I had the same thing happen to me. In a hansom one must be very careful, or the fool of a driver lets down the glasses and catches you on the

eye or knocks out a tooth. But, bless me, you will have a bruise; you cannot go with a black eye to the Brendons."

"I daresay it will be right in time."

"No, it will not. It will show black and yellow. What is to be done? I cannot be seen with you, if you are a guy. By the way, there is a letter for you from Laura. I know her sprawling hand. It is on the mantelshelf. How was your cousin?" The question was asked in a tone of indifference.

"She is very poorly; obliged to lie down half the day."

"If she will live in the slums, what else can she expect? Why, the atmosphere there is bad to the health and fatal to the complexion. 'La santé et le peau—avant tout.'"

"But she may regard it her duty to remain there, with her father."

"Fiddlesticks! He ought to consider his daughter. What chance is there of marrying her well, situated in that horrible part of the town? He should throw up his living and get one in the country."

Instead of pursuing the topic, Christine took her letter and opened it, after an apology to her aunt.

It ran as follows:—

"MY DEAR NIECE,—

"After all, I admit that you did the right thing, and acted with judgment in throwing over Captain Fenton. It has come out that he is not a baronet. His uncle was privately married, and has left a son, who, of course, inherits. No doubt you knew all this, but as it had been confided to you, you did not feel justified in telling it; but you might have made an exception to me as your aunt. It would never have done. You see, I quite approve of your conduct, and think you acted with excellent judgment. He attended the funeral in the expectation that Sir John might have remembered him in his will. But the old man died intestate, he was as crooked as the letter Z. So Roger got nothing at all, or rather minus nothing, for he will have to pay a pretty bill to Mr. Gallop for taking him off his practice and dragging him all the way to Sussex, and keeping him there over the funeral. Roger is gone to South Africa, which is well. It would have been awkward for you to meet him here; and he might have been fussing for a renewal of the engagement, which cannot be under the circumstances. How long shall you be away? People here are beginning to forget that story of the hunting-field, and are giving you credit for prudence in throwing Captain Fenton over before it was made public that all his prospects were going to disappear as smoke. I have had to give notice to Sarah Jane. She was most impertinent when I complained that the dessert dishes were put on crookedly. I wonder whether you can find me a respectable and obliging parlour-maid in town. Pray look out for one. A good deal

of worry has fallen on me during your absence that tries my nerves terribly. Still, I am unselfish, as all the world is aware, and I would not have you back just yet, till you can do so with comfort to yourself and me. Give my love to Barbara. I fear you will have a trying time with her, she is so exacting and inconsiderate.

"Your affectionate aunt,

"LAURA DEMANT."

"Well," said Lady Barbara. "How is my sister?"

"She is somewhat disturbed by losing her parlour-maid, and she wants me to find her one in town."

"What nonsense! Town servants will not go into the country. Do something to your face. We must dine with the Brendons on Wednesday; and though it is quite *en famille*, I must have you look your best."

Lady Barbara sat back in her chair, with the fire-screen between her face and the glowing grate.

"I am glad it is over," she said. "It was a thing that had to be done some time or other."

"What, aunt?"

"A visit to your cousin. You have done the civil."

"But—I am going there again."

"Again! though they are your relatives, excuse me, they have no social position, and therefore are not worth cultivating."

"Aunt! I lost my watch to-day, and a poor East-End girl found and restored it to me."

"She expected a handsome reward."

"And I saw a boy in a decline crouching over a hearth in which there was no fire."

"Those sort of people are accustomed to go without."

"But he was shivering with cold."

"Custom does wonders. It becomes a second nature. Touch the bell, dear, for Phœbe to put on some more coals."

CHAPTER XVI

A MORAL CRIPPLE

"This is in thee a nature but infected,
A poor unmanly melancholy sprung
From change of fortune."

Timon of Athens, Act iv. Scene 3.

ADMIRAL Sir John Chandos dined that evening as usual with Lady Barbara, and as usual played cribbage with her after dinner. The old gentleman apologised to Chris for leaving her to herself, and would have been glad to be excused the inevitable game of cards for a conversation with the girl who showed consideration for his infirmity and interest in his stories, but Lady Barbara would not permit it. She demanded her cribbage, and told him that Chris was tired and desired rest.

So Chris sat back in the shade, on a sofa, and mused, her musing hardly interrupted by the exclamations and occasional wrangles of the players. She thought of her downy bed, and contrasted it with the dirty blankets, the hard mattresses, with the straw bursting from

them, in No. 8, Queer Street. She looked round at the clean, sweet drawing-room, and then pictured to herself the chamber so foul, with its unwholesome atmosphere, that served as kitchen, sitting-room, and sleeping apartment to a whole family; in which lived that young man slanting to his grave, and that girl Brice, whom he would grapple and bring down the slope with him. The girl interested her. Rough and wild she might be, but there was some good in her. Yet how long would that good remain in the midst of such depraving associations? Would it not be smothered by the foulness around, and she become as hardened as the worst about her? And that young man, dying by inches, without conscience, without sense of duty, without ambition, with no ideal, no hope. And here were, before her, these old cribbage players, night after night, and she herself drawing, novel-reading, night after night, whilst their brothers and sisters, children of the one great human family, fellow-citizens in the grand kingdom of Britain, were sinking, sinking, sinking.

It was as though a tempest were raging without, and ships were wrecked, and the shrieks of the drowning rang in the air, and they—the comfortable—sat closer over their fires and stirred no finger to help those that

perished. Ulysses put wool into the ears of his mariners that they might not row to the Isle of Circe, allured by their strains. But these—the moneyed, the self-indulgent—stuffed their ears and sailed by, unwilling to hear the cries of such as were being engulfed in the fetid slime of moral and social corruption that was so near. The first recorded query ever put by man was, "Am I my brother's keeper?" and with this same question and a shrug of the shoulders, the man with money in his pocket will go on his way till the end of time.

In the old Roman world, the wealthy and well-doing crowded to the Colosseum to laugh and applaud as men fought and tore each other, and poured forth their blood, and died. We have made a great advance in civilisation. Now we turn our backs on the battle of life and the effusion of blood. Nevertheless, there is a deep well of pity in the English heart, never exhausted, always ready to flow. There are wealthy merchants and noble ladies prepared to make sacrifice of money to relieve suffering, but between them and the necessitous stands the great throng of middlemen and middle-women, who prey on their benefactions, filling their own pitchers, and allowing only the overflow to run down the gutter, to be scooped up in eggshells by the thirsty. The

organisation of Charity consumes the Charity, and gives only ashes and smoke.

Chris had been in France, and had seen there hospitals, almshouses, asylums, orphanages, schools, carried on by devoted men and women, who took from the funds supplied sufficient only to give them one suit of clothes per annum, and furnish them with the plainest food, and not receive one single sou for all their labours; but then, as Martha said, they served under the One Master. Here, in England, there were as well devoted men and women, full of zeal. But the givers mistrusted them, and put all their confidence in the parasites of Charity who fed and fattened on their donations and subscriptions. This was not all that worked in the mind of Chris. She thought of Roger Fenton, and the blow that had prostrated his hopes. He was now on his way to the Cape, and there might meet his death, like so many other gallant soldiers of the Queen who had gone forth to maintain the honour of the flag.

Brave he was, and would not shrink from his duty, that she knew full well. That he had good abilities was certain. That he would distinguish himself was beyond doubt. That, if he did return, it would be laden with honours,

hardly admitted of question. And then!—would the misunderstanding be at an end?

Next day was Sunday, and in the morning Chris went to the Abbey. As she looked about her at the large congregation, she saw that it was wholly composed of the well-dressed. To the west of the church lay a teeming population in slums as bad as any in the East of London; but not a single poor man or shabby woman was present in the Abbey at Divine service. Verily it is the genteel who get their religion cheaply through the benefactions of the past, intended for the poor, but diverted to the relief of the pockets of the well-to-do.

In the afternoon Chris put a bottle of cod-liver oil and another of sherry into a hand-bag, and started for Queer Street.

She found her way there without difficulty. The streets were quieter than they had been on Saturday afternoon. In Queer Street, as elsewhere, the people looked cleaner, and were better dressed. If they did not go to a place of worship, they, at all events, recognised the day as one on which to wash their faces, comb their hair, and assume their best apparel.

When Chris entered No. 8 she found Cecil there, and the fire burning; his sister was not within.

She produced the bottles and explained to him how he was to take the draught. She had brought with her a wine-glass bowl, of which the stem was broken.

"All right. I'll take it. But look 'ere, it won't do for father or the old woman to see the sherry wine, or they'll 'ave it down their throats in 'arf a wink. I'll stow it under the coals."

He had hardly done as proposed before in came a man of about forty-five and a slatternly woman.

"There's my father," said Cecil. "Father, this is the young lidy as Brice spoke about. She's brought me cod-liver hoyl for my cold."

"Very glad to make your acquaintance, miss," said the man, and the woman dropped a bob, intended as a curtsey. He wore a broken look, through intemperance. There was in him an appearance of faded gentility, and his speech was less vulgar than that of his children. "Will you take a chair? Sorry the surroundings are so poor. But times are bad, and the world has used me cruelly. I'm of good birth and genteel belongings, but I've been beaten down by adversity. I'm ever on the wharf looking out for my ship, and never seeing it in the offing. Let me introduce Mrs. Gogram, my 'ousekeeper, a very respectable person, been in 'igh society, was cook

once in a wholesale ironmongery. She's come down like me, through no fault of her own. A motherly body as looks after the lodging and the children."

"Glad to know you, sir," said Chris—she ignored the woman. "Your daughter rendered me a great service."

"And 'ow so, if I may make bold to ask? She ought to 'ave mentioned it. Did she say anything to you, Mrs. Gogram?"

"I lost my watch, and she recovered it for me. It had belonged to my mother who is dead."

"Ah!" said the man, "I've lost my mother too, and my legs is all of a tremble ever since."

"I've lost mine also," threw in the woman, "and my eyes 'ave run over like biling kettles ever since."

"She's a very feelin' woman, and a tiptopper in respectability," put in the man.

"Shut up, guv'nor, with old Gog's respectability. The young lidy knows what to think of that as well as me and Brice," was the youth's exclamation.

"But the wust wus," continued the father, ignoring his son's interjection, "when my wife ran away and left me. Whatever can have mide her do it I can't think. Me—a gentleman born, and the childer too. I've never been

the same man since. I do think if I 'ad a little port wine it might do me good. What say you, Mrs. Gogram?"

"It's the very thing to pull you up."

"I 'ope," said the man with an air of dignity, "as you 'ave been to a place of worship this morning, Mrs. Gogram?"

"Which I 'ave, and gave away my small cash in the horfertory."

"Gammon!" threw in the youth; "you won't get the lidy to think that. Hook it, Gogs, and find Brice; it's she the lidy wants, not you."

Grumbling, the woman obeyed.

"I was a gentleman once," said the man, "and I'm a gentleman still; I 'ave my little income and need not work."

"Then why live here? Go where better housed."

He shook his head.

"Can't do it. The money comes to me by post, and I don't know from whom, and so can't send and announce a chinge of address."

"There's Brice," said the woman Gogram, thrusting her head in, "sparrin' with the young chaps out in the street."

"I will go and speak to her," said Chris, and left the room.

CHAPTER XVII

BOUTFLOWER AGAIN

"There is small choice in rotten apples."
Taming of the Shrew, Act i. Scene 2.

CHRISTINE went forth into the street, and saw what was not an unusual occurrence there, a romp in which young men and girls were engaged. Brice was struggling with a couple of youths who were chaffing her, and she retaliated in the same strain. One of the lads had his arm round the girl's waist, and was attempting to kiss her, whilst another endeavoured to hold her arms. But Brice was too strong for them, and she caught one a stinging box on the ear, and knocked his Sunday hat into the gutter. She kicked vigorously at the shins of his assistant, till he disengaged her.

At the same moment she caught sight of Chris and flushed scarlet at the recognition.

She went up to her, and said, "Them young chaps is blackguards. I couldn't 'elp it. But I've combed their 'eads for 'em."

"Brice," asked Chris, "what was that they said, when you knocked off one of their hats?"

"Ain't going to tell you," retorted the girl. "'Twasn't fit for your ears."

"But—I do not mean precisely that. What name did they give you?"

"Brice, of course, that's my name."

"But one of them called you by another."

"Well, yes, he called me Boutflower, which I be. So's all of us, father and Cecil, except Mother Gogs. Sorry you seed them fellows larkin', but if you come into Queer Street you must expect queer goings on."

"Can we go somewhere together, that we may have a talk?"

"If yer goin' to rag me for larkin' with the boys, I won't go."

"No, Brice, I have something to say about Cecil and your father."

"There's a bit of garding in Crooke's Square, and if it ain't runnin' over with children we can go there. But what is it all about?"

"I will tell you when we are there. Meanwhile let me inform you that I have seen your father."

"He ain't much to look at," remarked Brice. "He's just an old drunken swine."

"That's not a very respectful way of speaking of your father."

"Can't respect one 'as ain't respectable. Bless your eyes, if it weren't for the red 'ot poker, I'd never 'ave got no rent out of him."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, look 'ere. He don't do no work, but mokes about from one public to another. I'm at the factory all day, and when post brings 'is allowance, he is there to get the horder cashed. Bust my stays if he wouldn't 'ave the lot down 'is throat if I did not go after 'im with the poker. Once I drove 'im under the bed, afore he'd shell out the sixteen shillings. He's afraid of the poker now. He burnt 'is 'and with it once, terrible bad, and 'owever fresh he may be he remembers that and cuts away from the poker, whether 'ot or cold. So I mostly gets the rent out of 'im now, and the rest, that's fourteen bob, goes in drink between 'im and Mother Gogs."

Together Chris and Brice reached the little square of Crooke—a dreary void space, with some sickly trees in it, with ink-black trunks. There were many children in it playing, but they secured a seat.

Brice planted herself on one and said abruptly, "Spit it out."

"It is this," said Christine. "I was very much astonished when I heard that your name was Boutflower, for I happen to have met with that name before."

"I don't see why not. I s'pose there are plenty of Boutflowers as there are Smiths."

"But the surname is uncommon. Can you tell me anything about your grandfather?"

"Blessed if I know. It's enough to be afflicted with a father, without being plagued with a grandfather as well."

"Do you not know anything about him?"

"Father always says that he was a gentleman; but I never heed what he says, he is such a liar, and is given to brag."

"Do you chance to know where your father lived before he came here?" asked Chris.

"Yes, I do know that. He 'ad a tobacconist's shop in 'olloway. But he didn't look after it, and mother 'ad 'er 'igh notions, as father 'ad 'is low ones, and so between 'em, it went smash, and we cime 'ere, and then mother went off, as I told you once before."

"That is all you can relate?"

"Yes. Father may know more."

"And, Brice, how is it about the allowance? Who makes that to him?"

The girl whistled. "I've my notion, but I know nothing for certain. All that I can sye is that it comes every month, somewhere about the beginning, in a postal order for thirty shillings. And it began to come after mother ran away. It may be she is a bit shamed at what she 'as done and sends this to the governor to mike peace. It may be it comes from

the bloke as she went off with, as a bit of mike up. I can't sye."

"Do you know where your mother is?"

Brice shrugged her shoulders. "'Tisn't much I care. I 'ave seen the postmark on the henvelopes, but I never gave heed to read it. But what about Cecil?"

"It is this. I am not easy about him. He needs a change of air and scene. He should go into the country. You have been into the country, I suppose."

"Yes, I was there one Bank 'oliday; never knowed afore where the shrimps grew."

"What do you mean?"

"I saw a whole field of 'em growin', thick as the 'airs on my 'ead."

"Surely not. They come out of the sea."

"Not they. I seed 'em grown on stalks. They weren't red but yaller. But they turn red when biled."

Chris thought for a moment, and then laughed outright.

"Why, Brice, what you saw was a barley field."

"I don't know nothin' about barley; but it was mighty like shrimps."

"Do you suppose it would be possible to persuade Cecil to go into the country to study shrimps? That is, if I were able to find a

hospital or a convalescent home out of town that would receive him?"

"I don't know. He's town born and bred, and whatever he'd do in the country caps me. He'd feel dull there."

"But if it were for his health?"

Brice shook her head.

"Well," said Chris, "I cannot be sure of finding such an institution. We must let it stand over awhile, and you sound him on the point. And now—run back to Queer Street and find out from your father what was the Christian name and what the profession of your grandfather. I will await you here."

In a quarter of an hour Brice returned with the information desired. Then Chris went back to Cumberland Mansions.

When dinner was over she said to Sir John Chandos, "Will you sit on the sofa by me? I want to have a little talk with you."

With alacrity the Admiral took the place offered him.

"What do you want with him?" asked Lady Barbara, not over pleased at the Admiral being drawn away from herself.

"I want, auntie, to have some talk with him concerning the Boutflowers."

"If you will. I shall go upstairs and write a line to Laura."

When the old lady had withdrawn, the girl turned to Sir John and said, "Now tell me what was your friend Boutflower's Christian name?"

"It was an odd one, Archimedes, but nothing to that of his wife. Her name was Briseis, called after a lovely captive who set Achilles and Agamemnon by the ears. I thank my god-parents that I was christened plain John."

"I am convinced that I have lighted on his son and grandchildren."

"The son was no credit to the name, and broke his father's heart."

"But the grandchildren?"

"I never met them."

"Sir John, the family is in wretched circumstances. The grandson, whose name is Cecil, is in a decline, and living with his father and sister in one room, infecting it with the poison of phthisis. It will kill the girl—she is called Briseis. Will you do something to help them?"

"The son was a bad fellow."

"But I am thinking of the grandchildren. Surely, Sir John, if you loved the Captain, you will do something, a little, to get the sick lad separated from his sister, before she is infected?"

The Admiral rubbed his chin.

"Miss Lavenham, I cannot refuse, for dear old Boutflower's sake. Put me down for fifty pounds."

"No, Sir John, I want more than that. I want your active co-operation. You must find me a place where to put Cecil Boutflower."

Again he rubbed his chin.

"'Pon my word, Miss Lavenham, I did love Captain Boutflower—one of the best fellows that ever breathed, and the smartest naval officer that ever trod the quarter-deck. A sad thing that one like him should be crushed by a vain, frivolous, and unprincipled wife. I will do what you desire, and am glad I have the means of complying with your wishes. I have a little box on the South Downs, he shall go down there, and my caretakers, worthy souls, will attend to him."

"You are the dearest old man I know."

"Ah, Miss Lavenham, what with your persuasive tongue and my recollections of Boutflower, I could do no other."

"Now, then," said Lady Barbara, entering the room, "if you have done with Boutflower, I will have a little talk with you."

CHAPTER XVIII

SIR JOHN CHANDOS

"*Tro.* What's aught but as 'tis valued?
Hect. But value dwells not in particular will.
It holds his estimate and dignity,
As well wherein 'tis precious of itself,
As in the prizer."
Troilus and Cressida, Act ii. Scene 2.

CHRISTINE was not one to allow the grass to grow under her feet. On the ensuing Monday she induced the Admiral to accompany her to the East End, there to meet the grandson of his old friend Captain Archimedes Boutflower. Not without misgivings did she propose this. She was not confident as to the result. Rags and wretchedness are picturesque in the etchings of Callot, but repellent in actuality. That is why with so many compassion leads to a cheque, but not to personal acquaintance with the objects of pity.

Would an introduction to the squalor of No. 8, Queer Street cause a revulsion in the mind of Sir John and chill down his awakened sympathy? Whatever the consequences might be, it was the right step to take, and Chris was one of those who was prepared to do what she

held to be right, and allow the consequences to take care of themselves. She purposed bringing her old friend face to face with the descendants of his comrade whose memory he cherished, and to leave him to follow his own course with them.

The Admiral heard better when in the street, with the roar of vehicles forming a drone, than he did in a room, and he and Christine were able to converse with ease on their way east.

When Bishopsgate Street was passed, Chris conducted him through a tangle of mean thoroughfares beyond.

"My dear Miss Lavenham," said he, "do you mean to tell me that you explored this labyrinth alone? Why did you not ask me at the outset to accompany you? I would have been proud to have acted as your guide and protector."

"Sir John, when I first came here I was unaware that it was a maze in which I might lose my way, but now that I have threaded it, I am the guide, and you must trust to me. I hold the clue."

Presently they reached Queer Street, and Chris entered the house, followed by Sir John. Happily, as she saw, Mrs. Gogram was at the upper end of the street, engaged in altercation

with another woman, and with her back turned to her, so that she did not perceive the arrival of visitors.

Within was only the unfortunate youth, crouched over a fire. He looked up and gave a jerk of the chin in recognition, but without thought of rising and troubling himself to tender a more gracious salutation.

"Here, Cecil," said Chris cheerily, "I have brought you a friend—Admiral Chandos, a very old acquaintance of your grandfather. They were together on many a cruise, and he desires to have a chat with you."

"All right," said the young man. "There's only one cheer. One of you can sit on the bed."

"No, thank you," was Chris's hasty rejoinder. "I must be off. I am going to see my cousin in the Buluwayo Parsonage, and I shall leave the Admiral with you. Perhaps, Sir John, when you have done, you will come and fetch me."

"My dear young lady, I shall not have done for some time. Can you wait for me till—perhaps late in the afternoon?"

"I will wait as long as you like. I shall lunch with my cousin."

"And," said Sir John, "I trust Mr. Boutflower will do me the honour of lunching with me."

"Very well. Good-bye, Cecil; remember me

to Brice." Then in a lower tone, "Speak up to the Admiral; he is hard of hearing."

When Chris had departed, Sir John Chandos took the sole chair that was sound on its four legs, and said, "I am come because I thought it might interest you, sir, to hear something about your grandfather, one of the finest men I ever came across, the smartest officer in Her Majesty's Navy, and the highest type of the English gentleman. Your grandmother's name was Briseis."

"I don't care a hang what she was," the sick boy replied.

"I cannot say, Mr. Cecil," pursued the Admiral, ignoring, perhaps not hearing, the remark, "that I knew your grandmother well, perhaps—but let bygones be bygones. As to your grandfather, it was an honour to have known him. By George! it is he who should have had a knighthood rather than I. But his health gave away, and he broke down in body and mind just as the prizes were coming to his hand. He was as modest a man as he was able. Mr. Cecil, it is a privilege to make your acquaintance—the grandson of such a man."

Young Boutflower eyed the old gentleman with a puzzled expression in his face. He was unaccustomed to this sort of address, and had

a suspicion that he was being made game of; but the suspicion was dispelled by the courteous manner and honest face of the old gentleman.

"Miss Lavenham asked me to call on you," the Admiral continued, "and I was but too glad to do so. The fact is, I am in want of services that you might render me. I understand that you have done some type-writing."

"I did that. But I have no machine, and I have done nothing for some time."

"Exactly. Well, I have it on my mind to write my reminiscences of your grandfather Boutflower—one of the best and truest of men—and it would be a sin to allow his good stories and remarkable experiences to be lost to the world. But, you see, I feel a delicacy in letting my manuscript go to an ordinary typewriter, out of the family. If you would undertake the work, I finding you the machine, we would soon settle as to terms, and I would deal liberally with you."

"I am sick, and my cough will not shake off."

"That is a hindrance that is temporary," pursued Sir John. "My dear sir, it is to my interest to pull you round. Have you been examined by a doctor?"

"Not I."

"Would you mind coming with me, and visiting an experienced surgeon who would

overhaul you. And we will go together to a good restaurant, and have a capital dinner, and I will tell you some stories about your grandfather. What do you say? Kidney pudding or roast beef—or veal cutlets with tomato sauce?—and, my fine fellow, a glass or two of stout will do you more good than claret."

"I ain't particular," said the youth, rising from his stool. "Old Gogs is out, and ain't got my dinner ready."

"And, sir!" pursued the Admiral, "let me tell you that in this raw winter weather, with so much fog about, you ought to wear a double-breasted coat, and—bless my soul!—if you will allow me to advance the cost out of what I shall be indebted to you for the type-writing, I shall be proud."

"Are yer gammoning me?" asked Cecil.

The Admiral did not hear the question. He went on, "Sir, Mr. Cecil Boutflower, to think that after all these years I should make the acquaintance of a descendant of my dear old friend! I am an old stick. I never encountered the woman who cared to be troubled with me, and so I cling to old recollections and to old friends. But come! I am hungry and want my lunch—I mean my dinner. We will provide you first with a warm overcoat, and then, perhaps, you can recommend me to a good restaurant."

The boy looked at his questioner with a puzzled expression in his eyes, and with twitching muscles about his mouth.

"I say, if yer mean it, I knows a eatin'-'ouse. Yer can get a blow-out for ninepence, and a stand-up for sixpence. But it's not the sort o' place for the likes o' you."

"No, it is not the sort of place for a grandson of Captain Boutflower."

"I ain't dressed respectable for a better sort."

"We'll have you rigged out at a ready-made clothing establishment. My dear sir, on such a bitter day as this, we will not dine at ninepence but on half-a-crown each."

"Well, 'ere's my 'at. Come along then, skipper! 'Ere comes old Gogs. I say"—this was addressed to the woman as she entered—"don't you do no rasher for me. I'm goin' to dine with a gentleman, an old friend of my grandfather, a Lord High Admiral he be—stand aside, and don't block up the way."

He rudely pushed by the woman, but Sir John, who had put on his hat, removed it, and bowed to the slattern as he went by.

Mrs. Gogram stared, and said, "My eyes! That there Brice 'ave brought in 'igh society. Wot next, I wonder? They'll be clearing me out. What a pity Boutflower is round at the

'Seven Stars.' If 'e'd been 'ere 'e might a borrowed harf a crown of the gent."

Never before had the slouching, pigeon-breasted boy walked down Queer Street with such a swagger as he did now by the side of the stately, spruce old gentleman with upright carriage.

The prospect of the double-breasted coat, and, above all, of the kidney pudding swimming in gravy, had put him in the best of spirits.

He said, "I've 'ad a row with old Mother Gogs, I 'ave. She found the bottle of sherry-wine under the coals, and in a jiffy she had it down her throat. Now I 'ave to take my cod-liver hoyle neat."

"We shall take the taste out of your mouth presently," said the Admiral.

Many hours were expended in excursions, first to a clothier, and there Sir John insisted on Cecil being provided with two complete suits, as well as with the promised overcoat. This latter the Admiral required the youth to put on at once as a protection against the cold. The suits were to be done up into a parcel and carried away with them. Thus invested, Cecil looked fairly respectable, and he was taken at once to an eating-house. The transformation in him was great after a good meal and a pewter of stout. He lost

his suspicious mood, became submissive, and willing to be ruled by his companion as to his further movements. He was taken to a surgeon, who sounded him, and pronounced that the lungs were weak, and that, although there was incipient disease, this might be overcome and fatal consequences avoided if the youth were taken out of London to some healthy place in the country, and were to use reasonable precautions against catching further colds.

"You see what he advises," said the Admiral. "Now, Mr. Boutflower, you accept my offer. I have a little place in Sussex on the South Downs. It is the very situation desired for you; the air is pure, the subsoil chalk. I have a caretaker there with his wife, honest, good people, who will make you comfortable. I am not disinterested. I want you to recover, so as to be able to proceed with the type-writing of my reminiscences of your grandfather. By Jove! we will take the public by storm. Of course, if there be anything in my manuscript that you think the family would not like to have appear it must be cast out. I leave you a free hand therein. The world will at last know what it lost in Archimedes Boutflower! It will learn what a splendid man he was. It is a privilege to me to have

a hand in such a work. Now, if you will be guided by my judgment, I would advise you to take time by the forelock, and go to-day to my place, The Pines. I can telegraph to my people there to make ready for you, and to meet you with my dog-cart at the station."

"Well, I don't mind," said the youth. "I ain't so over 'ead and ears in love with number eight as to care to see it again. But I must go there and put on my new togs, and fetch away my canary. Oh, my father don't care a snap for me, and as to Brice she'll learn it from Mother Gogs and Miss Lavenham, if you will tell her."

So they returned to Queer Street.

When Cecil issued forth, invested in a warm navy blue suit, he looked a totally different man. He walked upright, he became more gracious in his manner, in his hand he carried his bird-cage.

"What a gentlemanly fellow you look, upon my soul," said the Admiral. "What is born in the bone comes out in the flesh. By the way, there is much in your face that reminds me of my old friend. I trust the same likeness will be found in your inner man—a fine sense of honour, strict regard for truth, a high appreciation of duty, and what lies at the root of all, self-respect."

CHAPTER XIX

WILD NATURE

"The rudeness that hath appeared in me have I learned from my entertainment."—*Twelfth Night*, Act i. Scene 5.

WHEN Chris entered the parsonage in Buluwayo Place she passed a man who was leaving, and who, as she judged, was a doctor; and on being shown into the parlour, she found her cousin in tears.

"What is the matter, Martha?"

"I have just been told that I must leave town and be away for some months."

"Well, that is no crying matter."

"But there is my work, and I cannot bear to leave that."

"Now, Martha," said Chris, abruptly turning round a chair, and planting herself beside her cousin. "I came here to-day with a proposition. I had my doubts as I walked along, whether I should be able to induce you to accept it, but now I shall force it on you, and you shall accept it *bon gré mal gré*. You must go into the country and stay with my aunt,

Lady Laura Demant, who, I am convinced, will receive you, and during your absence, whilst you are gathering roses for your cheeks, and focussing sunlight in your eyes to bring the sparkle back, I will take charge of your club, and work it to the best of my poor ability."

"You do not realise what you would undertake."

"I think I do. That is to say, I have a rough idea of the undertaking."

"The girls," said Martha, "as they come to us are animals. They have neither reverence nor discipline. They are brought up from infancy to use the most horrible language, such as sounds on every side in their ears. They are familiarised with the most brutal forms of evil from their cradles. They have no regard for their parents, and flout them to their faces. They get beaten in their homes by drunken fathers, and sworn at by intoxicated mothers. But, indeed, they have not homes, only lairs. The street is their playground, and their only notion of sport is horseplay. When I started my club they rolled over one another on the floor, pulling each other's hair, swearing and cursing."

"You paint them in dark colours, Martha."

"I paint them with a brush dipped in nature's colour-box. They are animals, but

not mere animals. They have good in them. They are affectionate, they are good-humoured. And they are marvellously cheerful amidst the most depressing surroundings and in the most adverse circumstances.

"A change of fashion, the failure of a firm, depression in trade will throw them out of work, and leave them on the verge of starvation.

"The inexorable rent-collector comes round, and unless the rent be paid, they are thrust forth into the street. They face the most terrible trouble with a good courage; though their cheeks be haggard with want they never lose hope. But that there is good in them you know."

"Yes; what else would have induced them to surrender my watch and purse?"

"The divine image is besmeared and battered, and almost past recognition, but with patience it may be made to shine forth. It can be done, it is done, and that is the joy of the work."

"But will they come to your club?"

"At first starting they were shy and unwilling, but now we could have more than we can accommodate. The club-hours are the bright spots in their dull lives. They would not miss them on any account. The club does not interfere with family life, for they have no

family life, no home as we understand the word. They must have the club or the gutter."

"How often do you have club-nights?"

"Thrice in the week. On Saturdays they have their marketing. On two evenings we expect them to be assisting their mothers."

"And what are your rules?"

"They are few and simple—a ha'penny a week, and prompt obedience to the lady in charge."

"But do they not sometimes break out?"

"Yes, they break out, and then all your patience, tact, and firmness are required. If you cannot get the rebel to submit, you must expel her. But whatever damage she may do, whatever violence she may have recourse to, never summon the police, that would be fatal, you must rely on yourself and God."

"By the way—how about religion?"

"Let that be in your heart, and not on your lips. We have to civilise, to make the poor creatures human, before we can Christianise. The soil must be broken up before you can sow the seed. The one quality in you they will respect is not your ladylike ways, nor your kindness, but your firmness. Never yield, but be tactful. And there must be no favouritism."

"There you hit me hard. I have a favourite already, and that is Brice."

"She is not in the club."

"But she may come in when I am there."

"Show no preference in the club. Outside does not matter, as they know you owe a debt of gratitude to Brice. You will find the girls thoroughly independent, and free from servility. They belong to numerous social cliques, which, of course, you cannot recognise. For instance, the feather-cutter considers herself distinctly above the worker in the Bovril factory. In the same way the box-maker is above the plate-cutter; but each and all are ready to recognise superior knowledge and better manners, and acknowledge it without in the slightest dropping any of their very independent spirit."

"How do you spend your evenings?"

"There are classes for the girls, reading, musical drill, needlework, and dancing."

"Dancing!"

"You must have it. It gives them healthy exercise, and they are quite happy with each other as partners. I have recently started simple cooking, and they are as keen as mustard on that."

"And you really see results?"

"Such as astonish one. Now the club is very different from what it was at first. Then the girls were wild beasts. Now they have

acquired self-restraint, and are as proud of their club and of its respectability as any West End gentleman is of his. Once in the month we have an entertainment, with songs, dancing, and theatricals. My father is not prim and precise, and allows the choir members and those of the boys' guild to be present and dance with our girls. They must meet in the streets, if they do not at our entertainments at the club. Look at that photograph yonder."

Martha pointed to one framed against the wall.

Chris rose, walked to it, and studied it. The photograph represented a group of girls in drill costume, some standing, some seated, others reclining in front of them.

"There are girls here quite refined-looking," said Chris, "and one has a remarkably sweet face."

"That was a girl whose talk, when she first came to us, was so dreadful that it made one's blood curdle to hear it, and it had become to her so habitual that it was a real effort with her to control it. Yet now she is one of the dearest and best of my pupils. If I have a favourite it is she, but I let neither her nor the rest suspect it. Then, once more, you must visit the girls, know their homes, and make them your friends. When you have completely

gained their confidence, then they will pour out their hearts, their troubles in your ear. At such a time as that you may introduce religion, but do not pitchfork it in at the club door."

"Martha, I have weighed what you have said. My offer holds. Will you accept my help for what it is worth?"

"I will, indeed, Chris, with the certainty that you are the person above all others to do the work better than myself."

"Shake hands, it is a bargain. You shall leave so soon as you have introduced me."

"But how about Lady Barbara?"

"She is growing impatient, because I interfere with her cribbage. Sir John insists on devoting some time to conversation with me, and he persists in looking away from his cards to address a few words at intervals to me. Aunt Babs will be thankful to be rid of me for three evenings in the week."

So the afternoon passed, till the maid opened the door, and announced that a gentleman in a cab outside in the street would be glad to know if Miss Christine Lavenham was ready to accompany him.

"It is the Admiral," said Chris. "I must not detain him. Good evening, Martha."

When she was in the conveyance with Sir John, the old gentleman informed her of what

had been done for Cecil Boutflower. He had wired to his housekeeper to be prepared to receive him at The Pines. And now the only thing that remained to be done was to drive to Queer Street and announce the results to his family.

When the vehicle stopped at No. 8, Chris saw Brice at the door.

"Let me get out," she said, "and tell her;" and she leaped from the cab and went to the girl.

"Oh, Brice! I have news for you."

"What's up? There's been a grand old cove here, so Mother Gogs says, as 'as carried off Cecil."

"Yes, he has been examined by a doctor, who has ordered him into the country, where he will get strong and well. He has gone to-day."

"Well, now!" ejaculated Brice.

"And," said Chris, "the doctor says that your room must be disinfected, or you will go into a decline as well."

"I look like it, don't I?"

"The floor must be scrubbed, and the walls and ceiling whitewashed."

"Oh, ah! Any green in my heye? I'll risk it."

"It is not alone for you, Brice," urged Chris.

"I know that you are fearless, but you must consider Cecil. If he were to return, after having been made sound, into the same atmosphere, and to the same room, in the same condition, he would sicken again. Have you known any consumptives who have been at the A.P.C.?"

"Yes—one or two. They died right off on end."

"Of course they did, because they came back to the same conditions. Brice, I shall be here on Saturday with a scrubbing-brush and a bar of soap, and a pail of whitewash and a plasterer's brush, and disinfectants. You and I together will put a new face on your room."

"Git out!" rejoined the girl. "If you will have it done, why, I'll get my mate Selina Bultitude in to help me. But see here. I 'ave news to tell you."

"What are they?"

"The 'llowance made to father 'as been doubled. It's three pounds now."

"What good news!"

"I don't know. Not so sure as that. It means that there's more than double the money for father and Gogs to get drunk upon."

CHAPTER XX

THE BOUTFLOWER REMINISCENCES

"Honour pricks me on. Yea, but how if honour prick me off when I come on? Can honour set a leg? no: or an arm? no: Or take away the grief of a wound? no. What is honour? a word. Who hath it? he that died on a Wednesday. Doth he feel it? no. Doth he hear it? no. Is it insensible then? yea to the dead. But will it not live with the living? no. Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore I'll none of it."—*Henry IV.*, First Part, Act v. Scene I.

ADMIRAL Sir John Chandos had undertaken a task the magnitude and difficulty of which he had not measured when he proposed it.

Fluent of tongue, he was stiff of finger. An anecdote that he could relate with ease, was hard to set down on paper. His thoughts, his reminiscences congealed as the ink flowed.

He wrote and rewrote till he had shaped his material so as to be suitable to be type-written.

Lady Barbara asked him one day when he proposed publishing. The Admiral hesitated, and then admitted that he had really no idea as to when his work would be sent to the printer. His object was to find occupation for young Boutflower, and such occupation as might

interest him, and develop in him a sense of self-respect as the grandson of so worthy a man. He doubted whether his style was such as would commend itself to the public. He was nervously afraid of castigation by the critics. He was not sure that all his stories, the adventures described, were not chestnuts. For Sir John had been obliged to have recourse to Captain Marryat's novels for graphic descriptions of storms, shipwrecks, and sea fights.

For examples of high moral conduct he had dipped into the Percy Anecdotes. With the assistance of Sir John Ross he had painted an exploring expedition to the Pole, and with the aid of Kinglake had given picturesqueness to the feats of Captain Boutflower in the Black Sea during the Crimean War.

"But," said Lady Barbara, "why do you take all this trouble about a common man?"

"Dear lady," answered the Admiral, "he is a youth without ideals, with no conception of honour, truth, duty—and all this must be fashioned in him. I am setting before him a man, from whom he is descended, of whom he may well be proud, for there never was a man so——"

"I know all that," interrupted Lady Barbara. "But it is not altogether fact. You are impart-

ing all kinds of detail to the biography from extraneous sources."

"It belongs to humanity at its noblest. And this poor, stooping lad is a member of the great family of mankind, and the deeds of the brave and good belong to the entire stock. I make my friend—and with justice—the figurehead, and crowd on white sail behind."

One day he came to Chris, looking perplexed. "Miss Lavenham," said he, "I need your assistance for a few minutes, if you can spare the time."

"I am entirely at your disposal," said Chris cheerfully.

"It is this," said the Admiral. "I am making my friend Boutflower preach a sermon to the sailors, and, hang it, I cannot run it off the reel smoothly."

"But you understand the hearts of sailors."

"Yes; but I am in difficulties. I have been down recently to The Pines, and have seen that young man Cecil. He is getting on famously. He has found amusement on the Downs, and goes out with the son of my housekeeper rabbiting, or else hunting after hedgehogs, or squirrels' nests. During the morning he is engaged in type-writing the biography of his grandfather, as fast as I can get it ready for him. But now I am at a standstill. The lad

has no sense of responsibility. I have had a talk with him about it, and I saw that I was on a topic he could not understand. So I want to give him a lesson on the matter through his grandfather. I have got so far as this, that the chaplain has been eaten by a shark, and the captain thinks it right for him to read service on the Sunday morning to the crew. It is a fact, Boutflower did lose a chaplain that way, and he was the man to read the service on principle. I am quite sure I am putting nothing into his mouth, when I make him give a straight talk to the men. I know nearly what he would have said, only he'd do it so much better than myself. He could speak as he could dance and paint, to perfection. Well, I have dotted down a little address on Duty, but I can't make much out of it. It does not run at all like a pulpit oration."

"Is that a disadvantage?"

"You shall hear what I have done. You will render me a great service if you will polish it up for me."

"Read it to me, Sir John."

After some demur and a little shamefacedness, the Admiral began—

"I'm going, my lads, to give you a few words about Duty. There is not one among you, if the vessel had sprung a leak and was bound to

founder, but would hand the ladies and the children down the ladder into the only available boat, and then quietly yourselves go down with the vessel, sooner than take the place of one little child or feeble woman, to save your own skins. What would make you do that? Duty, my boys, duty!

"I read only last week, in the daily paper, of a nurse girl. The house was on fire and she with the children in the attic. The flames were up to the staircase. People had spread feather beds in the street, and told her to jump for her life. But she was responsible for four children, and before she would save herself, she cast each down and saw that it was safe. The room behind her was in flames, and after the last child was secure, she prepared to spring, but it was too late, the floor gave way and she perished in the fire. What made her care for her charge before her own self? Duty, my boys, duty!"

"Excuse me, Sir John," interrupted Chris, "but is it quite right making Captain Boutflower take in and read a daily paper on board ship—say in the tropics? Besides, I think I read that story in the papers last week."

"You are right. I never thought of that. I must cut that out. Now I will proceed.

"At Waterloo, my lads, as the red-coats

were shot down in their ranks, as cool as a cucumber those behind stepped forward to fill the gaps, with the prospect of falling next minute themselves—and some of these were raw boys who had never smelt powder before in their lives. What made them do it? Duty to king and country, my boys, duty! I have heard of a driver on a train, who saw that he was running into another; he might have saved his bacon by jumping off the engine, but he did not do so, he put down the brake and let off steam, and all—though he would be sure to die, to be scalded to death, mind you, when the smash came. Why so? Duty, my boys, duty! And I'd like to know to whom the duty is owed. Is it enough that it be to king, master, railway company, to induce a man to cast his children into poverty, and his wife to widowhood, and give up without a scruple ten, twenty, thirty years of life, and let his body go to feed fishes, or the fire, or the worm? Ay, and to discharge duty—whether he be seen or not, without a chance of a paragraph in the papers, maybe.

"No, my lads, duty must be due to One who has planted the sense in our hearts, and made us feel we are responsible, not only to captains and colonels, and railway board, but to Him above. Leave out that consideration, and duty

goes down like a house of cards, I'm darned if it don't."

"I think a less forcible expression would be advisable. Say—I'm nonplussed if it don't."

"The sailors would not understand it."

"Then say—I am at a loss to see if it does not."

"Well, but it sounds weak. However, I am in your hands. Now, what say you?"

"It needs no shaping. It is capital, all but the anachronism in the middle and the expletive at the end."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"There is one thing more. In a biography one is expected to give a lot of pedigree. If you can derive your hero from one whose name is on the roll of Battle Abbey, so much the better. Now I have not a notion who were Captain Boutflower's parents, so—as I cannot give the ascendants, I must put in the descendants, though no credit to the dear old fellow. I know he had a son—and I know who was Boutflower's wife, but whom that scoundrel of a son married I never heard. Could you find that out for me?"

"I will try, if I can catch the man sober."

A few days later Chris brought a slip of paper and put it in the Admiral's hand.

"There, Sir John, is what you require. I got it from the maudlin old fellow. He was married in Pentonville, the year of the Ashantee War, but he does not recall the day."

"Yes—whilst his father was off the Gold Coast."

"I suppose that you know his wife has deserted him?"

"I know it; Cecil told me as much, but that need not go into the biography."

Then he put the folded piece of paper that contained the maiden name of Cecil's and Brice's mother into his waistcoat pocket without looking at it.

CHAPTER XXI

A HALF RECOGNITION

"This weaves itself perforce into my business."
King Lear, Act ii. Scene 1.

CECIL BOUTFLOWER was walking along a lane under the South Downs. In one hand he carried a mallet and in the other a basket.

The fellow had a quick intelligence, and this the Admiral sought to sharpen. He had interested him by giving him Mantell's *Wonders of Geology;* and the young man saw a new world of ideas open before him, and a pursuit offered as interesting as it was novel. A cloud was lifted from the horizon, and hill and weald unfurled a tale. He took keenly to a search after fossils in the chalk quarries of the South Downs, and for sharks' teeth in the sand pits of the Weald. He was one day walking to a distant pit, when he heard screams for help, and presently saw a Shetland pony galloping along the lane with a boy on its back, clinging to the mane.

Cecil threw himself across the road, and flourishing basket and hammer, alarmed the pony. It slackened pace and stopped. Whereupon the boy fell off and howled as he lay in the mud.

"Get up, young yelper!" said Cecil. "You ain't 'urt, not you. You tumbled into a soft spot, that's all. Get up and don't be a fool. Mount your rat of a pony again."

"It's the fault of George," howled the boy, rising to his feet. "He was told to look after me, and he would go into the public-house, to see his sister, he said; and a boy cracked a cart whip, and my little Shettie went off and I couldn't stop him."

"They shouldn't 'ave sent a baby like you out on an 'os, but in a pram with a nuss, shoving you along. That's my opinion."

"I'm not a baby. I'm ten years old."

"I shouldn't 'ave thought it. You'll never be a man if you lives forty years, you won't."

"Yes, I shall."

"Not if you 'owls; every 'owl takes a quarter of a hinch off your stature as you'd be like to 'ave." The boy stopped crying.

"Now," said Cecil, "cock up your leg and I'll chuck you on to your perch."

"But I'm afraid Shettie will run away with me again."

"I'll walk beside you till we find George as is gone to see 'is poor dear sister. Who the blue blazes may you be?"

"I am a baronet. I am Sir John Fenton."

"You're a little un, then, and a poor speciment. Where's your lodgings?"

"At Fenton Court, with my ma. She is a real lady. The servants call her My Lady."

"She must be a buster. 'Ow far is it to Fenton Court."

"Not far away."

"Look 'ere, shaver. I've never seen the inside of a bigwig's 'ouse, so I'd like to be took over yours. I'll go with you to your ma, and you shall show me over the shop."

"Yes, I will, if you will not leave me?"

"And does the pa, the boss, live there too?"

"No, he is dead. We did not live at the Court while he was alive. Ma and me came there when he died."

"That's rum goings on!" observed Mr. Boutflower. "Is that the way with the bigwigs?"

"We used to live at Wynstead," the boy confided to his new acquaintance; "and then we had only one maid, Sarah, but now we've got lots—a cook and a dozen maids, and a footman and a butler. I like him—he's called Mr. Treneman—but Mr. Starkie don't."

"And who is old Starkie?"

"He comes from Wynstead; he is often over to see mamma."

"I understand. Looking out to be Number Two, when the lady has put off her cap."

"He does the accounts for her, and pays the wages."

"And slips the odd coppers into 'is pockets, I understand."

"And ma has got a carriage and pair, and a coachman, since pa died."

"'Ow thankful you must be he's gone to manure the potatoes. Well, pas are a noosance at times, a bloomin' noosance. Young nipper, whatever you do don't get a spade and dig pa up. Mother mightn't like it, nor old Starkie neither."

"You shouldn't speak to me like that," said the child; "you should say—Sir John."

"That's what a barrow-knight means, does it?"

They issued from the lane upon the public road and a tavern, and the groom George appeared at the door, wiping his mouth, and looking confused.

"Oh, George, you naughty man!" exclaimed the boy. "I was nearly killed. I shall tell mamma."

"I don't know what a barrow-knight means,"

said Cecil. "But if you go telling ma, you're a skunk."

"I'll give you a white rabbit, if you will not, Sir John," said the groom.

As they approached the park, the boy indicated the gates.

"If that's your 'ouse," said Cecil, "I don't think much of it."

"No," exclaimed the lad indignantly, "that is the lodge. See! the woman is coming out to open the gates, and she will curtsey to me."

"What do you pay her to do it?" asked Cecil. "But I suppose old Starkie sees to that."

As they passed along the drive, between fine trees, and saw the long sweeps of turf studded with stately timber, and a sheet of water, with the South Downs rising ghostly beyond, Cecil nodded.

"We've got Victoria Park near our little place," said he. "I know Battersby Park too, and that's finer. Do you 'ave peep-shows here in summer? Oh! that is the Court, is it? Well, the French Horspital is bigger, but maybe your 'ouse is rigged up fine inside. What 'ave you got on your pond?"

"Wild duck."

"Wild duck!" scoffed Cecil. "We've tame uns on the water in our parks. You should see

the gulls on London Bridge fed with sprats. You don't 'ave that 'ere, I'm sure."

Presently they reached the front of the mansion, and the groom helped the boy from his saddle, and took charge of the pony.

Perfectly unabashed, Cecil walked up the steps to the front door, and would have opened and entered, but he was forestalled by the butler.

"Oh, Treneman," said the child, "he helped me up when I fell off Shettie, and I'm going to show him the house."

"But, Sir John, let me first brush you down; you are plastered with mud."

"It is still wet," said the boy. "This way!" to Cecil, and he conducted him across the hall. "Come along. I must tell mamma that I have had a tumble."

Then the child rushed forward, opened a mahogany door, and burst in on Lady Fenton, who was seated by the fire, with the newspaper on the floor, and her hands on her lap.

"Oh, mamma! I have been thrown off, and in such a dirty lane."

"My child! are you hurt?"

"No, mother; he there picked me up and put me on Shettie again. I wasn't frightened, not a bit."

"That's a wopper!" remarked Cecil, as he entered with an air of unconcern.

He looked at the lady, at first casually, then more attentively. His eyebrows went up, as a surprised expression stole over his face.

"Mamma, he wants to be shown over the house."

"I really am very greatly obliged to you, sir," said the lady languidly, and scarcely deigning to look at the person she addressed. Then to her child—

"Oh, John, what a mess you have made of your new black suit."

"I was spilt into the mud," said the boy.

"And the mud of this country," observed Boutflower, "is not like London mud at all. It is like strong paper-hanger's paste mixed with fish glue."

As he spoke Lady Fenton looked. The intonation of his voice struck her, and a startled light came into her dreamy blue eyes.

"Mister," said the boy, catching hold of Cecil's arm with both hands, "you haven't told me your name,"

"My name, madam, is Boutflower—I am Mr. Cecil Boutflower, at your service."

The lady started in her chair. A rush of blood suffused her face, and after an intense look at the young man, she said, "Where do you live?"

"When at 'ome, ma'am, at number eight

Queer Street, East End. Now I'm stayin' with my good friend Admiral Sir John Chandos, K.C.B., at The Pines."

"John," said Lady Fenton, hastily averting her face, "go—go at once, show him whatever he wants to see, but do not come here—with him again. You see, I am busy, engaged."

CHAPTER XXII

REVOLT

"No mates for you,
Unless you were of gentler, milder mould."
Taming of the Shrew, Act i. Scene 1.

THE rent of the room occupied by the club was seven shillings and sixpence a week. This room was on the ground floor; the windows on one side looked on the street, but a single one on the other side into a yard paved with brick.

Dingy as the room appeared from without, it was cheerful within, especially at night when the gas was lighted and a fire burned in the grate.

There were no curtains or blinds to the windows, but there were shutters on the side that gave on the street.

Economy had been considered, and there was nothing to correspond for the windows that looked into the yard.

A piano stood at one end athwart an angle, so that the performer in the corner could com-

mand the room from the music-stool. On the walls were coloured pictures, Millais' Cinderella, and the boy blowing bubbles to advertise Pears' Soap. Also portraits of the Queen and Lord Roberts, and maps of England and the British Empire.

Miss Lavenham had been engaged on her cousin's work for four months. Lady Barbara made a pretence of grumbling at her niece's abstention on three evenings out of the week, but Chris was well aware that she was relieved by her absence. The Admiral encouraged her, not openly, but by a word apart occasionally, and with something more substantial, for he was ready to give her whatever she required to meet current expenses. The girls might suppose that they "ran the show," as they expressed it, with their ha'pence, but it was by no means self-supporting; for in addition to the weekly rent came in the bills for coal and for gas.

Christine had got to understand the girls, and they to respect her. She was "a good un, not 'igh, and with no nonsense about 'er." And she learned much about East End life.

She discerned that the influencing of one girl in principles of order, self-respect and cleanliness had a radiating effect. It helped not only the girl herself, but the parents as

well. It exercised a wholesome influence on their brothers and lovers.

Chris had tact and sympathy, without which all work done for the suffering and needy is but sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. Yet, as it chances, it is the charitable work that goes about with sounding brass and tinkling cymbals that draws subscriptions, not the still unadvertised labour of the true friends of humanity.

The girls came to understand Chris, as one who could be trusted, as one who had not an ear alone open, but a heart as well to receive their confidences.

She made mistakes, but no one saw that more readily than herself, or more diligently strove to rectify them.

Among her relatives and acquaintances—and she came to make many of the latter—there were such as ridiculed her work, others who disapproved (on conscientious scruples), others who misinterpreted her motives. The most wounding criticism was that of Lady Laura in a letter. "You are quite right, my dear niece, to take up with good works. Every woman who has made a *faux pas*, disguises it by a curtsey to My Lady Charity, and philanthropic soap is a sovereign detergent for tarnished reputations."

There was, indeed, much to discourage, but

there was more to cheer. Then came a great blow—which fell crushingly. The death of the Queen. This at once touched a number of girls engaged on white frillings.

Their work was stopped. They were left penniless. By the ravenous way in which they ate the bread and drank the cocoa provided for a ha'penny at the club, as well as by their hollow cheeks, their shrunken forms, Chris knew that they had eaten nothing else that day. But there was worse behind: the rent. And now Chris learned one of the great evils that weighed on the poor in the East End: the exorbitant rents they have to pay for the most wretched accommodation. Now it was that one of the benefits of the club began to reveal itself. The girls had ceased to be absolutely dependent on a single business. They had acquired in the club evenings skill in embroidering and plain needlework. Chris obtained work for them that served to engage their fingers and fill their stomachs, whilst the trade which usually furnished them with employment was at a standstill.

For this purpose she had to go about among her acquaintances and friends, and solicit orders and meet with humiliating rebuffs.

She had succeeded in securing Brice for the Club, but the chief triumph was the admission of Polly Flinders and two of her wild mates.

One evening as Christine entered the club-room she felt instinctively that the air was charged with electricity, and that an explosion threatened. The face of Brice wore an expression of anxiety. Three of the girls were whispering, and glanced defiantly at her. In other faces was a look of expectation.

But Christine gave no intimation that she perceived anything unusual; however, she kept her eye on Lena Naters, Polly Flinders, and Sarah Gripe, the three who appeared to be in concert and to be preparing a mutiny. They had but recently joined, and had not been caught and conquered by the *esprit de corps* that animated the rest. Their wild undisciplined wills had not as yet learned to take direction from someone else. As it happened this evening, Chris, knowing that it was a period of privation, had contrived in place of jam to provide sandwiches with a slab of cold beef between two thick slices of bread. And aware that she stood no chance of concentrating the attention of her pupils on work so long as there was a void within, she opened proceedings by dispensing refreshments.

Thus, the first half-hour was spent in supplying the material cravings of the young women. And the exceptional nature of the food produced a marked effect. The exclamations of

delight at it showed that all were in good humour, and Chris marked a waver of purpose in the intending rebels. But when her pupils were seated at the table, to do some elementary dictation, Lena and Sarah, she noticed, seated themselves one on each side of Polly Flinders, who, with a flushed face, nudged them and whispered something. Chris at once told two girls on whom she could rely to separate them.

"I don't want to sit by Jane Bultitude," said Polly. "I pays my 'alfpenny, and can sit with my mates."

"But I require you not to sit beside them," said Chris; "and my rule must be obeyed."

"Oh, ah! I ain't in prison. I can go where I loike."

"Sit there, where I have placed you, or leave the room," said Christine, and Polly sulkily yielded, muttering to herself.

Chris deemed it advisable to take no further notice, trusting that as the lesson progressed, the incipient signs of rebellion would abate, especially as Jane Bultitude whispered to Polly to keep quiet and give no trouble.

The lesson went on; and the girls wrote or scribbled.

"Polly," said Chris after a while, "you are doing nothing. It is of no avail your coming

here if you do not intend to take advantage of your opportunities."

"I ate my wittles. That's all I want."

"If you will not write, you must go."

"I don't want to go. It's cold outside."

Then do your writing like a reasonable girl. It will be serviceable to you to know how to spell."

"What odds is spelling to me! I want none of that."

"You mistake. It is well for everyone to gain improvement; and you came here for that purpose. Polly!" she exclaimed sharply, as the girl leaned back behind Jane Bultitude and pulled the hair of her mate Naters.

"I shall do as I choose," said Flinders.

"I am sorry to proceed to extreme measures. You must leave the room."

"I won't go."

Chris stepped up to Polly, and laid her hand on her shoulder. "Stand up!"

The girl obeyed, but said, "Lena, and you, Sarah, stand by me. We ain't slaves in a treadmill."

"Go; you must leave the room," said Chris. The girl made signs to her mates, who looked irresolute. Jane Bultitude held Lena down by the arm, and Brice passed her arm round the waist of Sarah Gripe. "Come on, you," using

a coarse expression, "stand by me, mates, and we'll 'ave the room to ourselves."

Chris took the girl by the shoulders, thrust her forth, and shut the door, whilst the girl screamed and swore.

So soon as she was ejected Christine quietly resumed the lesson in dictation.

She had not, however, proceeded far before the window-pane was smashed, and a brickbat whirled into the room. It was aimed at Lena Naters, but was deflected by the glass, and did not touch her.

The girls screamed, and Lena dived under the table.

Christine said, "Girls, sit in your places. This shall not happen again," and she left the room. She went into the yard in the rear, and saw Polly Flinders with her hands clenched, and the light from the illumined class-room streaming over her angry face.

"Blooming fools they are! I'll be even with 'em!" gasped Polly, convulsed with rage.

"Polly," said Chris, "you are wicked and silly. This must not go on. See! I shall stand with my back to the broken window-pane for the rest of the evening. If you choose to throw another brick, it will hit me, not Lena or Sally."

Then she returned to the club-room, and,

though looking pale, she walked to the one window that commanded the yard, and took her place as she had promised, with her back to it. As she did so she could see the irate girl picking up brickbats that stood in the corner of the yard, and through the shivered pane she could hear all her movements as she returned with the missiles to her place before the lighted window. The girls within could neither see nor hear what went on without.

"Now proceed with the lesson, and do not be afraid," said Christine; "the disturbance is at an end. And when you have done what I have read out to you, bring me your slates that I may correct them here."

The episode was soon forgotten. Brawls were too frequent in Queer Street to cause prolonged excitement, and the class scribbled till the task was accomplished.

Perhaps Christine's voice faltered slightly, for Brice looked at her curiously once or twice. But she stood her ground, though well aware that Polly was outside the window still, and had not departed. Not till the class was over, and the girls had left the room to disperse, did an exclamation from them show that they had found Polly, still standing — she had been standing for over half an hour—with a brick in each hand before the window, irresolute whether to fling or not.

Brice rushed in. "Oh, miss, Polly Flinders was there and might have killed you!"

"I knew it," said Chris; "but I knew that she would not throw it at me whilst my back was turned."

"You are a plucky un," said Brice. A moment later she said, "Please, miss, if you're not busy, and as Polly 'as gone off now, before you lock up may I sye something to you?"

"I am ready for you now."

"Well, look 'ere," said the girl, "we 'ad a letter from Cecil. What do it all mean?"

Chris took the paper, and read:—

"DEAR SISTER,

"If you 'ave got a hold envelope what contained the postal horder as comes to the governor, send it to me. I want to see the post-mark. Here's a rummy go. There's a lady near here, uncommon like our mother. I can't say as it is she. It's more nor ten years since I clapt my eyes on her, but she's doocid like. Send me a henvelope if you can."

"Have you found one?" asked Chris.

"Here you are," answered Brice; "I found it in the coals."

Chris took the envelope, examined it, and read the postmark—"Fenton."

CHAPTER XXIII

REVERIE

"Comes it not something near?
Pol. O, by too much."
The Winter's Tale, Act v. Scene 3.

"FENTON!" repeated Christine. "How very odd!"

"It's not the name as used to be on the letters," exclaimed Brice. "Then it was Wynstead, and we wondered whoever it could be in that place as sent us the money. And then we came to suppose it must be mother."

"Tell me something about her," said Christine.

"There ain't much to tell. She's been gone over ten years. I was a chit of a child then when she hooked it, but I know she was a rare beauty. She used to sit to painters as what they call a hartist's model."

"And did she leave your father for a painter?"

"That's more nor I can tell; I don't know nothin' about it. You see, she weren't comfortable at 'ome. After the tobacconist busi-

ness caime to a smash we moved 'ere. Mother never liked 'ard work, and did love 'er comforts."

"Do you remember her well?" asked Chris, as she began to wash up the cups that had been used for the cocoa.

"Can't say as I does," replied Brice. "But I do recollect one day she said as she did love suet pudding with beef gravy, and would go anywhere for it. I was a little thing then, and Cecil was ten; but I never forgot that about the suet puddin'. I don' see 'ow the tobacconist shop could answer. Mother was away bein' painted, and father he never attended to nothin'; and what was got by 'im went down 'is throat, and what she earned she put on 'er back. So it was very unpleasant when we came 'ere, and she cut it all."

"It showed sad lack of principle," said Chris.

"Lack of suet puddin'," replied Brice. "You can't 'ave principles on top o' emptiness."

When the chairs had been arranged against the wall she said, "Me and Jane Bultitude went to Bethnal Green Gallery last Sunday, and there's some picturs there lent by gents, and one of them I sed to Jane was uncommon like mother as I mind her."

"I should like to see it, Brice."

"I can't go with you," said the girl; "you see, I'm at work all dye, and after dark the

Gallery is closed. But you can't miss it. It's a pictur of a young woman sittin' with 'ands on 'er lap, and with great dark blue eyes. It is called the Referee."

"I suppose that you would be glad to see your mother again?"

"I don't know. She ain't been to Queer Street to clap eyes on us these ten years and more, and they as don't care for me I don't care to know."

"But she does care for you, if it be she who sends you the money."

"Yes, if it be mother and not the bloke 'as took her off. But I wish now that the money was sent to me and not to father. It is three pounds now; I'd be able to do a lot with that, and not let the boss and Mother Goggs drink it awye."

"If I could see your mother, I would tell her this. So—the letter has the Fenton postmark. Fenton is in Sussex. Do you know what name your mother bears now?"

"No, but, you bet, she don't call 'erself Boutflower," said Brice. "It really bothers me about the money. Father'll let me 'ave just the rent out as before, and with the rest drink himself into delirium tremendous, and then we'll have high junks at number eight."

"Yes, it would be far better," said Chris

meditatively, "for her to do so. And, however much she may have wronged you all, it would do her good and bring tears from her heart to hear of you, and know what a dear girl you are."

Next day Chris went to the Bethnal Green Gallery and easily detected the picture. It was by a well-known artist, one Stanley Lucas, and was entitled "A Reverie."

A very pretty girl was represented in the costume of the eighteenth century, in white, with short waist and long skirt, flounced at the bottom, and with arms bare. Her hands were folded on a book upon her lap. About the delicate throat was a coral necklace. Her hair was dark, as were her long eyelashes, and the great dreamy violet eyes looked musingly out of the painting into a far distance. Chris could trace in the picture a resemblance in feature to Cecil, but his was a coarse and vulgarised likeness, nevertheless the likeness was there.

She left the gallery in deep thought.

"Yes," she said to herself, "I must try to find her, so as to induce her to send her contributions to Brice instead of that dreadful father, or some catastrophe will ensue. How is it to be managed?"

By the time she had returned to Cumberland Mansions she had formed her plan, and this

she communicated to Sir John Chandos. She told him the circumstances, and asked him if he would call on the artist and ascertain from him whether he knew what had become of the model from whom he had painted the picture of "The Reverie."

The Admiral readily consented, and on the very next day visited Mr. Stanley Lucas, sent up his card, and was shown into the drawing-room. A few minutes later the painter came in.

"Will you excuse me?" said the old gentleman, "I have come on a strange errand. It concerns an old study of yours. Her name was Boutflower. She was married to the son of an old friend of mine, one of the best and ablest of men, and one of the finest officers in Her Majesty's Navy."

"Boutflower!" said the artist; "I do not recall the name."

"It happened a little over ten years ago," continued the Admiral. "Excuse me, sir. People say that I am hard of hearing. I do not admit it myself; but then in conversation I miss what is said unless the tone be slightly raised. There is a painting of yours now on exhibition at the Bethnal Green Gallery called 'The Reverie,' and it is thought to be much like her."

"'The Reverie'!" echoed Mr. Lucas. "Yes,

I remember the painting well. It was done from a model, sitting at the time, rather lacking in animation, but uncommonly pretty. She sat well, but it was impossible to get much expression into her face. Hang it! what was her name? It was not Boutflower."

"Her maiden name was Eliza Smith."

"Of course it was. Now I recall it perfectly."

"She was, however, married at the time; perhaps you were unaware of the fact."

"We know, as a rule, nothing about our models. She gave her name as Eliza Smith. Married was she?"

"Yes, to my worthy friend's son, a good-for-nothing dog, whose misconduct brought the poor father to the grave."

"Indeed. I have completely lost sight of her. She sat for 'The Reverie,' and I saw no more of her.

"I am sorry to tell you she deserted her husband."

"Oh, well, I might have suspected something of the sort—not that I had any notion that she was married—yet——"

"We are desirous of tracing her. Can you afford us a clue?"

"I fear not. And yet—but it is hardly fair—I suspected at the time."

"May I ask what you suspected?"

"At the time I was engaged on the portrait of a gentleman—a baronet—and I fancy he paid marked attention to her. He saw her in the studio, and I had a notion that he hung about the place, and saw her home on more occasions than one. I put two and two together, when she disappeared immediately afterwards—but I have no other reason for that conclusion, and I may be wronging him."

"Would you object to tell me his name?"

"Yes," said the artist; "that would be unfair. As I tell you, I know nothing for certain."

"You are right," observed the Admiral, "I should not relish it myself to have a bit of scandal set afloat that I had run away with another man's wife. Quite right, sir, quite."

"The Baronet is dead. He died last autumn, but *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*, and further, *nil dubium*."

"Thank you, sir, much obliged. I must apologise for transgressing on your valuable time."

So with bows and compliments they parted.

Sir John returned to Cumberland Mansions, and said to Christine, "My dear, I have not learned much, only that Eliza Boutflower, who called herself Eliza Smith——"

"Was that her name?"

"It was her maiden name. You gave it me on that paper, and I found the marriage entry in the Pentonville register."

"Go on, please."

"All that I have been able to ascertain is that she possessed great attractions, and that a baronet was very attentive to her, some ten or eleven years ago, when the picture of 'The Reverie' was painted, and that the baronet died last fall of the leaf."

"Good gracious!" Chris's heart stood still.

"Have you any suspicion, Miss Lavenham?"

"One of the vaguest. There may be a mere coincidence, yet it is strange, very strange. The money comes to the Boutflowers from Fenton, and, as I have told you, the late Sir John Fenton was secretly married. It is strange. How far is your place from Fenton Court?"

"About four miles."

"Would you allow me to go with you to The Pines when next you visit it? I should so much like to see Cecil Boutflower—how he is progressing, that I might report to his sister; and, perhaps—it is a chance—I might learn something of importance."

"I shall be delighted. I go there next Saturday."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PINES

" Discourse is heavy, fasting; when we have supped,
We'll mannerly demand thee of thy story,
So far as thou wilt speak it."

Cymbeline, Act iii. Scene 6.

SIR John Chandos and Chris arrived at the station for the little box which the Admiral possessed on the skirts of the South Downs, and where he had some rough shooting. They were driven to The Pines by his factotum along a good road. The swelling downs were on the left, looking faint, and as though powdered with a flour-dredge, and the rolling well-wooded weald on the right.

A sharp turn to the left, up an ascent, and they were at the house. Cecil Boutflower came out at once to meet them. Chris was pleased to see the change in his appearance. He was well dressed, his face had filled out, the feverish fire was gone from his eye, and the hectic flush from his cheek. But—and that she could not see — as great an improvement had been operated within, partly from the healthy

surroundings, mainly by the solicitude of the Admiral, who had not merely supplied the body with nourishing diet but the mind as well with nutriment. Cecil had, as Sir John had discovered, an eager intellect. In his early days he had fed on literary garbage, the penny novelette, the poisonous expectorations of those soured men who, incapable of constructing anything, set their whole ambition on creating and spreading ruin.

The Admiral had studied the young man on his occasional visits to The Pines, and had seen that he was an omnivorous reader. He therefore supplied him with books to interest him on the history of his country and its institutions, travels in foreign parts to widen his knowledge of the world, works on Natural History to teach him to observe the wonders of the life everywhere about him.

What Cecil absorbed was not wasted; it went to build up mental tissue. His moral nature acquired a more healthy tone.

The education of the young man had not progressed far in four months, but the foundation had been laid, and where before all was a refuse heap there the lines of structure began to show.

In manner and in speech there was ample room for improvement, but it was something

that he was aware of shortcomings in himself in this particular.

"Oh, Mr. Boutflower!" exclaimed Chris, taking his hand, "this is a pleasure. And what a tale I shall be able to tell to Brice on my return, of how well you are and what a pretty place you are in! Sir John has been so kind as to afford me an opportunity of seeing both you and The Pines."

"I don't think they'd know me again in Queer Street," said Cecil, with some justifiable pride. "I 'ardly know myself, I'm that better," and then, with awkwardness, "I must thank Sir John for it all."

"No," replied the Admiral. "No, Boutflower, you must thank the splendid constitution, mental and bodily, that you inherit from the ablest and best of men, your grandfather. You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, but neither make a sow's ear out of a silk purse. You have got the Boutflower blood in you, and the making, sir — and such a man as the Captain was, a man——"

"May we go in?" asked Chris, alarmed lest he should launch in a panegyric on his friend whilst still on the doorstep.

"Come in, certainly," said Sir John. "We shall have luncheon served directly, and I will tell you a thing or two about him after it."

When the meal was concluded, Chris said, "There must be some pretty walks around this place, Mr. Boutflower."

"Ay, there are, and interesting as well. I've got some fossils, if you care to see them, a couple of sponges, reg'lar beauties. I dug them out of a chalk-pit on Tuesday."

"There is a good fire in the drawing-room," said the Admiral. "Let us go in there, and Mrs. Willing can bring us there our coffee. I am not a smoker myself, and I do not think Mr. Boutflower indulges in the weed."

"Never 'ad the chance. The gov'nor could not spare me the pennies for the tobacco."

"You see how it comes out," said Sir John. "My dear old friend Captain Boutflower never smoked. It is so with Mr. Cecil."

When they were drawn round the fire in easy-chairs, Chris returned to the interrupted subject.

"I cannot say that I am learned in fossils. I don't think there were any in that part of England where I usually lived. There must be some beautiful gentlemen's seats in this neighbourhood, I should suppose."

"Yes, I daresay," was Cecil's reply.

"Have you seen Fenton Court?"

"Yes," replied Cecil, and his face expressed reserve.

"Is it far from The Pines?"

"A good way."

"I knew someone whose uncle had it," said Chris, and a slight colour mantled her cheek. She looked into the fire as she spoke. The young man did not respond.

"Who lives there now?" she inquired.

"A Lady Fenton, and a nipper they call Sir John."

"Fenton Court," put in the Admiral. "Yes, I know. There was a very odd man there, the late Baronet. He had a bee in his bonnet and was a sort of Puritan. I never saw him. There are some funny stories afloat about him. Married he was, and no one guessed it. It came out after his death."

Cecil's face was drawn, and he refrained from speaking. Chris turned to him, and looking him steadily in the face, inquired, "Have you chanced to walk that way, and have you seen Fenton Court? Is it a fine place?"

"Middling. It might be finer."

"I should like to know if it has fallen to your luck to see this Lady Fenton who lives there?"

"I have seen her," Cecil replied drily.

"What! when out driving?"

"No. I went to the 'ouse. I had picked the boy up when he fell from 'is pony."

"What aged lady is she?"

"Come, come!" interrupted the Admiral. "Men are no judges of women's ages. Now there is your aunt Lady Barbara. I have never given a thought how old she is, for she is always young to me, so full of animation."

"Hark!" exclaimed Christine, "I hear the sound of wheels."

She rose and went to the window.

"Who can this be?" she inquired. "A carriage and pair with coachman and footman on the box."

The Admiral rose as well and went to look.

"That is odd," he said. "No one was aware that I was here, so who could think of calling."

"A lady in mourning is getting out. And the liveries are black."

Chris went back hastily to her seat by the fire, and the Admiral also resumed his chair.

Next moment the housekeeper opened the door and announced "Lady Fenton!", and was followed into the room by the person named.

The Admiral and Boutflower arose.

The lady, dressed in widow's weeds, entered the room in a nervous, frightened manner, and looked about her in bewilderment at those she saw before her.

"I beg your pardon," she said; "I wish to see and have a word with Mr.—Mr. Boutflower. I think that is his name."

"Yes," said Cecil; "I'm your man."

"He was so good to my little boy," apologised the widow, turning to the Admiral, "that came for the purpose of thanking him personally. Might I be allowed a word with 'im in private?"

Chris kept her eyes fixed observantly on the woman. She was greatly surprised at the visit, but so also was Cecil, who stood irresolute and confused. The lady's colour came and went, and she was in nervous perplexity. She had evidently expected to find Cecil alone, and was bewildered at finding two other persons with him, of whom she knew nothing.

"By all means, My Lady," said the Admiral. "I myself have to attend to some little things about the place. I have come down from London, and I always find, when I do come here, that there are various matters claiming my attention. I brought Miss Lavenham with me. Allow me to introduce myself and her. I believe that we are neighbours, though I have not hitherto had the happiness of making your acquaintance. At your service, Lady Fenton. We will both retire. Miss Lavenham is desirous of overhauling Mr. Boutflower's collection of fossils."

"I shall not detain you long," said the lady

nervously, her fluttering blue eyes dancing from one to another. "Just a word of thanks, and then I will go."

"May I offer you a cup of coffee, it is just coming in," asked the Admiral.

"No, thank you—only a word with Mr.—Mr. Boutflower." The name seemed to stick in her throat, she brought it out with difficulty or reluctance.

Sir John bowed, opened the door, and ushered Chris forth. When they were alone, Cecil faced Lady Fenton.

"What do you want with me? Why have you come meddling 'ere?" he asked, in a hard tone.

"I thought—that is to say, I fancied, the other day that you said something to me."

"I said 'ardly a word."

"Then I read it in the expression of your face."

"I thought you looked precious uncomfortable when I gave my name. I can tell you that," said Cecil. "I 'ave got a sister named Brice. 'Ave you ever 'eard that name afore? Now it's a curious fact that money comes by postal horder every month to the dad in Queer Street, first from Wynstead, where I learn you lived at one time, and no sooner do you tumble into Fenton Court than the postmark and

horders come from Fenton. I suppose you never kept a tobacconist's shop in 'Olloway?"

She said nothing, but put her hands together beseechingly, and he saw that she was trembling.

"I don't know," pursued Cecil, "'ow you came in for this title and all the money and the park and big 'ouse. I don't want to know. You goes your way and I goes mine. I don't seem to remember your carriage stoppin' at our little place in Queer Street, nor seen your pasteboard these ten years, and I don't think I shall care to call on you for the next ten. But I'll say this, you ain't treated us as you should, or old Gogs would not a' mothered us. Go on sending the money to the gov'nor, and don't mind me bein' 'ere. I'm with a very good friend, Admiral Sir John Chandos, K.C.B."

"I saw by your face," faltered Lady Fenton, "that you supposed me to be someone you had known."

"Cut along! Never mind what I supposed, say I thought it then, and know it now."

"Then, I pray, do not say a word of what you think."

Lady Fenton began to cry. "You do not know what trouble it might bring on me. It might lead to the stoppage of all the money you say is sent monthly to your father."

"I never mentioned him," said Cecil; "'e's beneath my notice."

"Pray be silent as to what you think. It involves most serious consequences to me—to all."

"Right you are. I understand. I'll keep my tater-trap shut. But let me tell you, you're a bit late, a day after the fair, My Lady. Them people you saw in 'ere, leastways the young lady, will be axing me all kinds of searchin' questions. And you 'ave done the wust thing you could 'ave done in comin' 'ere to look me up just when they were present. If mischief comes of it, it won't be through me."

"You promise to be silent?"

"Yes, never fear. I can tie my tongue in a knot."

"Then I rely on you. I will go. But mind, I make no admissions. I do not say that I am what you fancy, but I do not desire to 'ave people talking about me and spreading tales."

"All right, the sooner you hook it the better."

Then Lady Fenton left hastily.

When Christine and the Admiral returned, Cecil was sitting before the fire with his lips pursed.

"She come 'ere to thank me for 'aving

picked her little nipper out of the mud, and led 'im 'ome the t'other day," said he. "Lord, 'ow your 'igh folks do make a fuss and palaver over trifles. She might 'ave said all she 'ad to say afore you both. But it is the way with women, they like to make mysteries out of nothing."

CHAPTER XXV

FENTON COURT

"Very little pains
Will bring this labour to a happy end."
King John, Act iii. Scene 2.

FROM the manner of Cecil Boutflower, Chris saw that the interview with Lady Fenton had not been confined to the boy's accident. The young man evaded communications on the topic, and appeared uneasy when it was approached.

With ready tact she desisted from attempting to press him where he was reluctant to speak, but she had arrived at conclusions of her own. During the few minutes when she was in the room with Lady Fenton she had studied her attentively, and she was convinced that she was the original from whom "The Reverie" had been painted. Notwithstanding the difference in age, the resemblance was striking. The same brow, the same delicate chin, the same large, deep violet eyes, under long, dark lashes.

She was perplexed. There was a mystery before her that must be solved. It was one that concerned the Boutflowers, but Captain Fenton as well. Chris saw no issue clearly. There were possibilities involving great issues, but they were possibilities only.

She doubted for a while whether to take the Admiral into her confidence, and tell him her suspicions; but, on consideration, she resolved on keeping them to herself and saying nothing to anyone. If this dark and perplexing matter were to be cleared, it should be by herself. She had a shrewd wit and self-confidence. Her research might lead to an *impasse*, but if not—she was dazzled with the prospect of a great discovery that loomed before her.

On the morrow, Sunday, in the afternoon, Christine asked the Admiral to allow his man, Willing, to drive her a little way, that she might see something of the country, and he readily acceded to her request.

The dog-cart came round to the door.

The day was lovely. The season was early spring, when the buds were bursting. All nature was rippling to laughter with the joy of life that thrilled its bosom.

"Which way, miss?" asked the driver, as they reached the main road.

"Towards Fenton, if you please. Mr.

Willing, I hear that there have been changes there."

"There have, miss," answered the man. "Rather queer ones too, if all that folk tell be true. The old gentleman had a slate off, and the water got into his brain. No one knew that he was married. But so soon as he was dead his widow and son arrived, and there they be now. The lady drives about now in a very smart carriage."

"So I understand. How was it that she did not live at the Court when Sir John Fenton was alive?"

"Well, there is something that I don't understand. Catch Mrs. Willing—that's my missus—letting me be anywhere and she not after me. But all women are not alike. They say Sir John and she did not get on together. Nor does Mrs. Willing and me at times, but we lives together all the same. She have a temper, have Mrs. Willing, but I'm wonderful forbearing. You see, miss, she was a cook once, and the heat of the fire gets into 'em."

"Did Lady Fenton never come to the Court during the lifetime of the Baronet?"

"Oh no! Not she. It would have been another story if it 'ad been Mrs. Willing. Lord bless you, miss! the imagination that woman has! She'd have been a poet if she

hadn't been a cook. What she do fancy I'm after, when I'm as innocent as a sleeping lamb."

"Where was Lady Fenton before she came to the Court?"

"I've heard tell at Wynstead."

"At Wynstead!" echoed Chris, and she recalled what Brice had told her of the post-marks.

"Yes, that is the tale, and none knew about it but Mr. Treneman, the butler. He was sent over there to see how she was conducting herself, or to take her money, I can't say which. And when she came here—that is, to Fenton Court—she brought a Wynstead lawyer with her, to manage the property for her, as the poor lady would not know how to manage for herself, and he turned away the old steward as was with the late baronet. He's got everything in his hands now, has that lawyer chap. Why, Lord, miss! if Mrs. Willing was no more, and I was to ax a young woman to come and see my 'osses, and pass an opinion on how I groomed 'em, as sure as a gun, she'd be up out of her grave, winding-sheet and all, and give me a bit of her mind."

"Was Lady Fenton a Wynstead lady?"

"Can't say. I know nothing but what folks talk about. But that she had been living

at Wynstead, that's certain. Which way, miss?"

"Drive to Fenton Court. I will call there."

Chris had resolved to see Lady Fenton. No doubt remained in her mind now that she knew that the lady had lived at Wynstead. Her change of residence synchronised with the change of postmarks.

Willing drove through the gates and into the park, along the stately drive to the front of the house. There Chris descended and rang. Treneman answered the summons, and she sent in her card, with the request that she might be allowed to speak for a few minutes with Lady Fenton. The butler showed her into the drawing-room, placed a chair, and said, "I will tell my lady," and withdrew.

The room was large, fine, and cold. No fire was laid in the polished steel grate. The room looked as though it had been unoccupied for half a century. Two glass-cut lustres hung from the ceiling, and were enveloped in bags of yellow muslin. The furniture was upholstered in yellow satin. The walls were white, with pilasters that had gilt capitals. Between them were paintings in heavy gold frames. Everywhere cabinets filled with porcelain. Chris was not much of a judge, but she could see that priceless Sèvres ware was

there. In fact the late Sir John's father had been one of the English imprisoned by Napoleon in 1803, and he had amused himself during his compulsory arrest in France in collecting specimens, then easily obtainable. The chimney-piece was of richly carved foreign marble, and much fine china was ranged on stages above it. The floor was covered with a heavy, over-florid carpet.

Christine took a seat, and had time to look about her before the door opened, and Lady Fenton entered. The lady made a bow, and said apologetically, "I am very sorry that you have been shown in here. You must be cold. I never myself sit here, the room is so large, and there are so many pretty things in it. I am afraid lest my boy, Sir John, would break them. He is a little rough. But will you come into the boudoir which I occupy. It is warm. I am so glad to have a call. Will you follow me?"

Chris did as desired. She crossed the hall, hung with family portraits of stiff gentlemen, with spindly legs and trunk hose, and stiffer faces; of hard-featured Elizabethan dames, with dresses inflexible with embroidery; a field-marshal, wearing a breastplate, a crimson sash, and buff lappets below the steel, a baton in his hand, and with a background of smoke

and conflict; ladies very *décolleté*, with powdered hair, caressing lap-dogs, with colonnades behind them, and the inevitable red curtain to show off their complexions.

The boudoir was a small room, panelled with painted deal; it was warm and cheerful. There were a few good pictures, of smaller size than those in the hall, against the wainscot, also of ancestors. At one end was a heavy bookcase, well furnished with bound volumes.

"I am so glad that you have called," repeated the lady. "None of the neighbours have done so as yet, and I find it dull in the country."

"I daresay Christmas festivities have occupied them," explained Chris.

"Oh, but Christmas is long past. I have been here some four or five months, and no one has been to see me but some ladies for subscriptions. The house is so large, and I have had such trouble with the servants, and no one to speak to. Do you live at The Pines?"

"No," answered Chris. "I have no real home of my own. I am an orphan, and am now with my aunt, Lady Barbara Fitzwarden, in town. But my friend Admiral Sir John Chandos has been so kind as to afford me a little change for a few days in this charming

country. That must be my excuse for calling to-day."

"I am so glad to have a call at any time," said the lady, with a sigh. "Do take a chair."

She spoke with the laboured precision of an uneducated person, aware of her deficiencies, and especially careful about her aspirates, and sometimes overdoing them.

Lady Fenton sank into a chair, and let her hands drop on her lap. She was still very pretty, and wonderfully well-preserved.

"I have had much trouble with my servants," she said, with another sigh. "I had to dismiss those who were here. They presumed, and were insolent; and now I am afraid that those I have will not remain with me. I was far happier in a small house with a single maid-of-all-work."

"I can well believe that," said Chris. And then broaching what was her object in coming, she said, "I have called to see you, Lady Fenton, about your charities."

"Ah!" with another sigh, "I feared as much. There have been six ladies here with collecting cards, and none without."

"You mistake me," said Chris. "I am not going to trouble you in that way. I desire merely to offer a suggestion with regard to a charity you are in the habit of giving."

"I—I did not know that I was"—the lady raised her large dreamy blue eyes, and looked perplexedly at her visitor.

"Unless I mistake, you have been in the habit, most generously, of sending monthly a sum of money to a poor family living in the East End of London, the Boutflowers, of Queer Street, Shoreditch."

Lady Fenton's hands contracted spasmodically, and her head sank.

"I think you saw one of them here from The Pines," pursued Chris.

"Oh!" said the widow, and added, in a low voice that quivered, "Oh! that was one of them, was he? A young man who rescued my poor boy from what might 'ave been death. Sir John's pony ran away with 'im."

"Yes, that was Cecil Boutflower. He was in a condition of utter wretchedness, and apparently going rapidly into a consumption."

"He looks well."

"He is much better. The Admiral, who had heard of the case, sent him to The Pines for country air. He had no mother to watch and care for him. What I am come here for is this. You are so good as to take an interest in this unfortunate family. Now, unhappily, your generous aid goes to the wrong person—to the father, who drinks it nearly all away,

along with his despicable housekeeper, a Mrs. Gogram."

The lady turned her seat round that her face might not be seen.

"What I am come to ask is this——"

At that moment the door opened, and a boy rushed in. "Mother! mother! I've got a white rabbit."

"Go away at once. I don't want you 'ere." She turned a flushed face towards the child, and Chris saw tears sparkling on the long dark lashes. She signed hastily to the boy to withdraw.

"Oh!" exclaimed Chris, as the light fell full on his face, "how like Brice!"

"Go, go!" cried the mother. "I cannot 'ave you here. Go, John."

"I want to see the lady."

The widow started from her chair, and dragged the child away, not without protests loud and violent.

When she had rid herself of him, she returned to her place, and again seated herself with averted countenance. "What do you want?" she asked in a faltering voice.

"I was on the point of suggesting that in future you should—if you have no objection—send your kind contribution to Brice—I mean the daughter, and not to the father. He gets

hold of the money, and allows her barely sufficient to pay the rent. All the rest goes in slow poison. It is in his interest, and that of the family, that I entreat this."

"But I don't admit—I mean that I never knew these people. They are total strangers to me."

"Oh!—if I am mistaken, I am so sorry, and I offer my humble apology. I had a sort of notion that the money came from you, as it was sent first from Wynstead, and then from Fenton."

Lady Fenton sighed, and wrung her hands —those white hands that looked as if they had never done a stroke of work. "I don't know anything. I wish Mr. Starkie was 'ere; he manages everything for me, and tells me what I ought to do. Please to say no more about this—I can't say anything till I 'ave seen Mr. Starkie."

"Then," said Christine, "you will allow me to withdraw, Lady Fenton. Sir John Chandos's cob is at the door, and has been recently clipped. I am so afraid of his catching cold. Of course, I am mistaken, and there is an end of it. I apologise, and wish you a good-day."

When she was on her way back to town the following day, in the train, with the Admiral, she said to him, "I know everything now—

that is, all but one thing. I want the register of the marriage of Eliza Smith with Sir John Fenton."

"That is easily got," replied he; "I can obtain it for you any day from the Registrar-General."

"Then get it to-morrow. When I have that everything is in my hands."

CHAPTER XXVI

LETTERS

"This was the most unkindest cut of all."
Julius Cæsar, Act iii. Scene 2.

"LONGRIDGE LODGE, BARNFORD.

"MY DEAR COUSIN CHRISTINE,—Really I have been too neglectful in my correspondence. And yet I am longing to hear about my club and the dear girls.

"Do write and tell me how all is going on. And yet I am sure that everything is for the best under your direction. I could not have wished for anyone more suited to go on with my work than your dear self.

"I have some things to tell you about Barnford. Your aunt Laura has gone a round of visits, and has left me so much to do that this must be my excuse for delay in writing.

"I have not picked up strength as readily as I expected, and I get very fatigued, so that writing is a trouble to me—but not to you, to whom I can always open my heart. The air here is rather too relaxing for me, and I would perhaps have done better to have gone into some cheap and quiet lodgings on Exmoor, where the air is more bracing.

"But all as God disposes. I must remain here till Lady Laura returns, as she has made me responsible for everything. She is now in Ireland, where, however, I do not think she has many relatives; and I fear that the title, having been trailed in the mud by the Earl, may make the people there shy of her. As to the estates—the Land League has inflicted such privations on the formerly well-to-do families that they have had to cut down expenses in every way, and are indisposed to entertain. However, there Lady Laura is, she is now staying with Lord and Lady Patrickstown, who are connected, as you know, with your family and with the Brendons. She seems to be happy.

"She had a very rough passage from Holyhead, and suffered exceedingly. She gave me a graphic account of the voyage, and with details of the sufferings, that might have been spared with advantage. However, there was an obliging and attentive stewardess, who became less amiable only at the last moment. If I am not much mistaken the fault lay rather with your aunt. I have no doubt that Lady Laura was most exacting on the passage, and forgot to acknowledge this to the satisfaction of the stewardess on her leaving the boat. But this is surmise.

"I am thankful to say she is now quite recovered. From what she says, I gather that she purposes staying as long as she can in Ireland; she dreads the return voyage. But she has not many acquaintances in the Emerald Isle; however, she is resolute to make them, and when she chooses she can make herself

vastly agreeable, none more so. Consequently she may manage to secure a good many invitations to various houses. That is what she is scheming for, and she does not desire to return here till after Midsummer, and when the seas are quite smooth.

"I have been put to some difficulties. Lady Laura wants me to get rid of two of the maids, so as not to have to pay their wages, or for their keep during her absence, and to look out for fresh ones, and have them in by her return, whenever that will be. But, really—one must give a month's notice, and suitable servants do not come when one whistles for them. Besides, those who remain will grumble at extra work put on them, and, although I try to give as little trouble as possible, I am not strong enough to do everything for myself. Servants nowadays like to keep to their proper routine and not to have the duties of others thrust on them, even temporarily. Lady Laura has taken her lady's-maid with her, a new importation from France, whom you kindly found for her. A bit of news that may interest you concerns the young doctor, Mr. Thomas Bates. He is engaged to a rather nice girl, I am told, a Miss Brandscombe, who is related to a good many people in the neighbourhood, she has also money of her own. And the alliance will help to increase his practice. For him, from a professional point of view, it is a good move.

"As to that hunting adventure of yours with Mr. Bates, do not worry over it. It is all forgotten. No one thought it was other than an accident that was unavoidable, but it was made much of at the time by

people who were piqued with your aunt. I fear Lady Laura is not popular here. She has made many enemies, and has given offence to certain well-meaning and unobjectionable people. She will not wear spectacles, and being short-sighted she cuts acquaintances in the street, and that annoys them. She looks them straight in the face and ignores them. They regard it as caprice and pride, whereas it is really that she is myoptic. I wish that you could persuade her to adopt glasses. I suggested it, but she put it aside with a 'I should look such a fright.'

"Did you know a Mr. Paste here? He has gone financially to pieces, and in a discreditable manner, and has disappeared from the scene, regretted by none. He was, according to all accounts, an underbred, ill-mannered man, only endured because he hunted, and was supposed to be wealthy.

"I find that the rupture of your engagement to Captain Fenton has increased your reputation with a certain kind of people here, who put it down to your practical common sense in rejecting a man whose prospects broke down. All miss you greatly, and I am asked repeatedly when you will return. I reply, not till does Lady Laura.

"A Mrs. Parkhouse has been here to call on me. I do not know the circumstances, but I gathered from her that she feared that she had treated you with scant courtesy before you left, and that she regrets it now. She sent all sorts of kind messages to you through me, and read a penitential litany which I leave you to imagine for yourself.

"A Mrs. Taillebois and her daughter have also

been here. The girl is going to town to stay with some relatives, and the mother wishes you to call on her and take her about, and I fancy introduce her to the Brendons. I said that I would mention it. You will act in the matter as you see fit.

"And now, at last, comes that which I have purposely left to the conclusion of my letter, not because it is a *bonne bouche*, but quite the contrary, it is something I am reluctant to write, because I know it will cause you pain. But if you do not hear it from me you will from others. It is—ah me! poor Chris—it will make your heart ache and therefore I grieve to report it. It is that Captain Fenton is back—sent home. He has committed some errors in South Africa. I believe that he neglected to have outposts, and a convoy under his charge was rushed and taken by the Boers, with some sad loss of life to our men. As I understand the story, he had no suspicion that the enemy was near, but that hardly justifies the neglect of ordinary precautions. He was fresh to his duties, and had not the experience that have older officers. As the Boers were short of supplies, the capture of the convoy was a great boon to them.

"But this is not all.

"There was a second disaster, which was more serious. He had received instructions for a movement of concentration on the enemy. Whether he misunderstood his orders, or did not follow them out with sufficient promptness, or whether, as is more likely, the nature of the country prevented their execution, I do not know. But the plan failed, and the failure has been attributed to him. So he has

been sent home. I am sure that the fault does not lie at his door, and it is quite possible that it was made by someone else, and the blame has been thrown on Captain Fenton to screen the others.

"Here he is in Barnford, but does not like anyone to see him, he is in a pitable condition of dejection. I am told he is quite a broken man. I wish there were someone here to give him a cheering word. I hear he leaves for town almost immediately. I am told he has chambers there. Here he was not visited or noticed by any of his old friends, but that may have been because he shut his door against everyone. If he has made mistakes he is suffering for them acutely.

"There, Chris, I have told you all now, and I know how you will feel this that comes at the close of my letter. Although there is now no tie between you, yet I am sure there is a warm corner in your heart for the poor fellow.

"I remain, dearest, ever yours,

"MARTHA."

"Oh, Roger! poor, poor Roger!" exclaimed Chris. Everything else contained in the letter was forgotten in the supreme distress over the final item of news. "Oh, how he must feel it! If he had a mother, or sister, or brother to be with him now and comfort him! Poor fellow, so sensitive, and with so high a sense of honour. Eating out his heart with shame,

and in solitude. It was not his fault. He was in no way to blame. It was the fault of Lord Kitchener, or whoever was the general. If I were set to build a ship, who had never gone through my apprenticeship in naval construction, could I have built one that would be seaworthy? It was wrong putting duties on him when he was inexperienced, but everyone who blunders is not found out. Of course his superior officer ought to have been sent home with a reprimand, and not he."

She had not time to open a second letter that awaited her return to Cumberland Mansions, before in burst Lady Barbara with: "Chris! this instant, listen to me, I want to speak to you. Whoever would have thought it? Don't attend to her. It is like Laura—preposterous."

"What is it, aunt?"

"I have heard from her. She is in Ireland with the Patrickstowns and writes to me. Good gracious! no one but Laura would have had the effrontery to do it. She says that she keeps up her establishment at Barnford on a scale beyond her own private means, and calculated on the assistance she received from you, and that consequently she does not see why you should not go on paying a share towards its maintenance, a guinea a week, and that I must

content myself with the second guinea. Can you conceive anyone so unprincipled, so avaricious, so grasping? I have not a doubt that she is making that girl Martha, your cousin, pay for her board and lodging with her—screwing it out of the father, a poor East End vicar. I don't know it, but I suspect it, for I know Laura as does no one else. She was always like that, born to be a screw, and quite shameless in her exactions. And to think of depriving me of the trifle I, with my miserable pittance, am forced against my will to ask of you. You know I am the most free-handed of women, but I have not the means, and Laura has. I can get only what I can out of that *mauvais sujet* Tullymore. Just like Laura. Well, she is—she is—although my sister."

When Lady Barbara had flounced out of the room, flourishing her sister's letter, Christine wearily opened the second letter, and it ran as follows:—

"BRENDON HOUSE.

"DEAREST CHRISTINE,

"Do come and dine with us on Thursday, which is, I know, one of your free nights. A Miss Multiplies, a literary lady, who writes for magazines and newspapers, has begged me for an introduction, so I have asked her for Thursday. There is also Lady Emily Driver, a great philanthropist, coming.

She is desirous of giving you her views on the social regeneration of the working classes. So I will take no refusal.

"Ever yours,

"FRANCES BRENDON."

Chris sighed and said, thinking only of one thing—

"Oh, poor Roger—poor Roger—poor, poor boy!"

CHAPTER XXVII

THE LANDLORD

"We cannot feel too little, hear too much."
King Henry VIII., Act i. Scene 2.

CHRISTINE went early to the club. She had her accounts to make up. She kindled one jet of the gas, got out her book, and lighted the fire. She did not expect the girls for another hour.

There was, as she knew, an adverse balance, but it was not serious. The Admiral was willing to help her if she appealed to him, but she was reluctant to do this, he had been so liberal hitherto. The Brendons and other friends had given her some assistance. Lady Brendon was a sweet woman, who warmly sympathised with her work. But before soliciting help, she desired to know exactly how the club stood financially. She had been distraught in mind over Roger Fenton, the trouble he was in weighed on her. She knew that she possessed all the information necessary to obtain for him Fenton Court and the

title. Yet she was in doubt how to proceed. She desired to let the matter remain in abeyance, and she shrank from acting with harshness towards the lady and child who had usurped a place to which they were not entitled.

To eject her without provision of any sort for the future would be cruel. The woman was not an unscrupulous adventuress, but a shuttlecock beat from one battledore to another —one of those creatures loving comfort, ready to go a long way so as to secure it, but without calculation, and without evil intention.

That the lawyer Starkie was aware of the circumstances she did not suppose. He was a shrewd man, scheming perhaps, who had gained the woman's confidence, and was using his opportunities for his own ends; but that his client had told him exactly how she was situated was not likely, it was not consistent with her character, as Chris measured it, to be perfectly open.

If she were to be summarily turned out of Fenton she would be left destitute, and the remittances to No. 8, Queer Street, would cease. Christine resolved not to stir in the matter at once, but to bide her time. There was no urgent necessity for her to hurry the crisis.

As she was engaged on the accounts she looked up, and saw a face peering in at her through the window that looked into the yard. This did not concern her, and she continued her calculations. Presently the door was partly opened and a head was thrust in.

She could see that the face belonged to Polly Flinders.

It was precipitately withdrawn.

She remained undisturbed for ten minutes. Again the door opened, and the girl put in her head once more, stared about, then came in with a bounce.

"I've got a lot of stickin'-plaster," she said. "They gave it me at the post office, off the stamps, and I don't mind mending the window. What 'ave you done with the broken glass?"

"Oh, Polly, I do not know! I think it has been thrown away."

"That's foolish," said the girl; "I can mend a window-pane with stickin'-plaster. But if you've throwed away the bits of glass, I can't do nothin' to it. I would, though, if you 'ad kept 'em."

"I am very sorry, Polly, but it is hopeless. It was shivered into such tiny pieces."

"One can do a lot with trying," said the girl. "But there, I might 'ave chucked the brickbat at your 'ead."

"I know you might, but I did not think you would do it."

"No, I didn't. If I 'ad, I'd 'ave smashed your nut."

"Yes, indeed. But I thought too well of you to suppose you would do so."

"Where'd you be now if I 'ad a-done it?"

"In the hospital, or in my grave."

"Well, as I didn't do it you might thank me."

"So I do, Polly."

"Thanks ain't very fillin'," retorted the girl.

"What do you want?"

"You might give me one of them sandwiches with a lot of meat in it."

"I am afraid I have none to-day."

"Well, give me some with jam."

"You shall have them and a cup of cocoa as well when the water boils. Why, Polly, what boots you have on! The water is oozing out of them."

"Well, I ain't got no others. There's not so much money coming in that I can 'ave a pair of new boots when I like."

Christine gave the wild creature some bread and jam, and saw her devour it greedily.

"I ain't 'ad a bit of food atween my teeth to-day," she said.

"How is that? I thought that you and your sister were in full work."

"Then you thought wrong. My sister Alexandra got 'er fingers cut over the tin cases for matchboxes, and it's gathered and swelled right up 'er arm, and she can't draw on the sleeve of her gown."

"But your father?"

"Father!" jeered Polly. "He ran away when the County Council pulled down Quanters Row to build up their new patent blocks for the workin' classes. You see, they tore down scores of 'ouses, and sent a lot of families 'omeless wanderin' about whilst the palace was a-buildin'. We was out in the street for over ten days, chivvied about by the police, and then father got us in with another family into a room in Paradise Place. But there was mother and four little uns all to keep, that didn't leave much to father for tobacco and all, so he hooked it and went on the tramp, and we've never seen 'im since."

"But you are in work, Polly."

"No, I'm not. It's slack times, and me and a lot of other gals is turned off."

"How many are you at home?"

"There's me and Alexandra as works when we can, and there's mother and four children as ain't good for a penny. And mother is ill

and took to her bed. So now that Alexandra's fingers is bad, and me got the sack, there's just nothing at all."

"What have you done for food?"

"Done without," replied the girl. "That ain't the wust. There'll be old Cohen round soon for the rent, and I aven't got it for 'im, so it's out we'll 'ave to turn. I've sold the bedstead from under mother for four-and-twopence, and she 'as to lie on the floor like the rest of us. But we've eat up the four bob, and when old Cohen sees we've no money he'll have us out sharp enough."

"You must persuade him to give you a little time, till you are in work again."

"Persuade old Cohen! You might as well persuade a ginger-beer bottle. He won't take no excuses nor believe no promises. I don't blame 'im. He has to collect the money for some gent in the West End, that he may drink champagne and eat sausage rolls and jam puffs. He's set to do it, and he does it."

"Listen to me, Polly. If you had only attended this club, you would have learned to make yourself useful in other ways than your usual work."

"But as I 'aven't been, I can't—there you are."

"Who is your landlord?" asked Chris.

"Surely if he was aware of the state of the case he would not be exacting."

"Blessed if I know. He never comes this way. Not he. Look 'ere. If we be kicked out, mother and the little uns and Alexandra and me, may we shelter in your backyard, and when this 'ere room is not wanted for the club may we be in it?"

"I can hardly allow that, Polly."

"Well, let us 'ave your backyard. We could put mother into the coal hole. The rest of us could shift in the yard. There's a sheet of galvanised iron there, and I could beg a couple of sticks and some nails, and rig up the iron sheet as a roof, and the children and me could snuggle under it at night when it rains."

"No, Polly, that won't do. But I will help you as well as I can. I will be responsible for the rent for one week, and I will go to see your landlord and tell him the circumstances. I daresay he knows nothing about you."

"Old Cohen does."

"But I shall not go to Cohen nor to the solicitor's clerk who underlets the rent to Cohen, nor to the firm that orders the clerk, but direct to him who employs the agents, who employ the clerk, who employs the Jew."

"Will you promise?"

"Yes, I promise it, if you will ascertain his name for me."

Polly Flinders stood on one foot musing. Presently she said, "I'll be bound the greengrocer at the corner knows. I'll go ax her."

"Do so, and tell me."

"And you will see him, and beg him to 'ave patience with us? I swear, when I'm in work again I will pay up."

"On my word I will do it."

Then the girl departed, and Chris returned to her accounts. But her mind was distracted. The overwhelming misery that surrounded her depressed and bewildered her. How could it be relieved? How could the condition of the poor creatures be altered? What could her feeble efforts avail? The County Council tore down the rookeries, and cast the rooks with their unfledged little ones into the street to be trodden underfoot, or if they crept into corners, to shiver to death. Philanthropic men and women strutted on platforms and harangued. Societies raked money together, but what came of it all? A legion of middle-men were kept in comfort. Those in real distress were left to suffer, or only such were picked out for relief as could figure in reports. Christine thinking, and with her eyes clouded with tears, made mistakes in her calculations, and had to

do her sums of compound arithmetic again. Presently Polly Flinders reappeared.

"Well," asked Chris, looking up from her book, "have you found out who is your landlord?"

"Yes; all our alley, Paradise Place, and Seven Street, and a lot of the 'ouses about belongs to a bloke as they call Captain Fenton."

"Captain Fenton!" echoed Christine.

"Yes, that's the name. Now, mind, you've promised to go and see 'im!"

"And I will keep my promise, Polly, so soon as I have learned his address."

CHAPTER XXVIII

DIVERS OPINIONS

"Wilt thou not speak all that thou knowest?"
All's Well that Ends Well, Act v. Scene 3.

WHEN the ladies retired to the drawing-room and left the gentlemen to their wine and cigarettes and politics, Miss Multiplies tripped across the room to Chris, and seated herself by her on a settee in a corner.

"Now, Miss Lavenham, let us have a quiet chat together. I am so interested in your work. It is most engrossing. I am literary, as you may chance to know, and purpose writing an article on Social Work among Girls in the East End of London, for one of our illustrated magazines."

Miss Multiplies was a lady, very straight down from her shoulders to her feet. Her dark hair was plastered in broad loops over her ears, and gathered into a bunch on top of her head where it was held together by a tortoiseshell comb. She wore abundant white frillings and lace about her throat and bust, but her breast was

as flat as that of a man. Her eye was restless and acquisitive, ever on the search for material to be used up in literary composition.

"Come," said she, "tell me all about it, everything you can. I have been down East and run my eye over the locality for colour. Now I require particulars. I want statistics, details, and anecdote."

"This is a large order."

"Oh, only for an article of ten thousand words. I suppose I can have photographs of the girls, first in their sluttishness and rags, and then as washed, combed, clothed, and civilised?"

"I think not. In their sluttish stage they were not photographed."

"But they would put on their rags for the occasion?"

"I am sure they would object. And then they are out all day and only come to the club at night."

"But I will send down a photographer, and we will have them taken by flash-light."

"I don't know about that," said Chris gravely. "I have no desire to see my club brought into public notice, and to have the likenesses of the girls exposed in shop windows."

"I can answer for it, they would like it."

"But it would do them harm."

"I cannot for the life of me see that. How-

ever, this is a detail that may be postponed. We shall come to understand one another admirably by-and-by. I am enthusiastic over your work."

"For copy's sake?" asked Chris drily.

"Of course from a literary standpoint. I am literary or nothing. Now you positively must furnish me with your experiences and the private histories of the girls, and describe to me the dreadful homes they live in and their shocking associations. Then give me a lively picture of the transformation you have effected, and furnish me with touching instances of their gratitude."

"I can do none of this. I have not the skill. Moreover, it will not do to have them and their pitiful stories flourished before the public eye. It would not be fair to them that their lives should serve to amuse the general reader."

"Oh, there is nothing in that. Everyone is interested nowadays in such stories."

"But my girls shall not be interviewed."

"Will you not take me down to your club?"

"Yes, I am ready to do that, so long as you do not meddle with their private histories for the sake of making copy out of them."

Miss Multiplies appeared disconcerted.

"I did think I was going to get so much interesting matter from you. I am sure you

could tell me a great deal if you chose. And consider—publication would bring you in so many subscriptions."

"I could tell you a great deal, assuredly; but I do not care to have it proclaimed on the housetops. As to subscriptions, if I need them I shall ask for them in my own way and not through the press."

"Tell me—have the girls been photographed?"

"Yes."

"Then furnish me with a copy."

"My cousin has the photograph. She is out of town."

"But who took it? The man may have preserved the negative."

"I do not know. It was done before I came on the scene. But I am quite sure that my cousin will object to reproduction."

Miss Multiplies shook her head impatiently.

"Do you object to furnishing *me* with your rules?"

"Not in the least. They are these. A ha'penny weekly and prompt obedience."

"Is that all?"

"Everything."

"But that is not sufficient. I want particulars."

"Such you will have to seek elsewhere. But

for pity's sake keep clear of Queer Street and Buluwayo Place."

"You are very unkind."

"To whom?"

"To me."

"But not to those for whom I am responsible?"

"Well," said Miss Multiplies, "you are shockingly reserved. I must go to some other quarter for what I seek."

"I fear so. I really am sorry, but my duty is to my girls, and that is paramount."

"Well," sighed Miss Multiplies, and rose and crossed the room to take a vacant place by Lady Brendon. Thereupon, Lady Emily Driver started from her place to that occupied by Chris, and flounched down beside her. She was a lady decided in all her movements, firm of walk, hard of feature, peremptory in manner. She was a public character. Philanthropy was her profession or hobby. She had taken it up, not because she had a heart that melted at sorrow and privation and pain, but because she was energetic by nature, and wished to have something as an occupation. She made public speeches, was great on committees and boards; she talked with authority as one who had made a scientific study of the needs of the poor.

"Now, then," said she, "Miss Lavenham, we will have it out between us. You are on the Buluwayo Mission Staff."

"No, Lady Emily, I am not."

"Oh yes, but you are. You manage a club in connection with the church in Buluwayo Place."

"I took temporary charge of one started by the daughter of the vicar."

"Oh yes, yes, I know. I don't approve of it. It would have been well for you had I been consulted before it was started. I could have given valuable advice on the lines upon which it should have been run. I have enormous experience. I make the study my speciality. I know the East End of London intimately. I know how these things ought to be initiated and carried on; and also what ought not to be done."

"It was a pity, no doubt, that my cousin had not the advantage of your valuable counsel. But there is a gain in trying to do a thing in the way one can, and by the light given one and not by the reflection of the opinions of others."

"I object to all denominationalism."

"We are, at the club, only so far denominational that Martha and I are Christian women, and suppose our girls to be the same, although, alas! some of them may be poor

Christians indeed. Yet some are far better and stronger than I should have been, placed in their circumstances."

"No, that is an evasion. You are affiliated, more or less, to the Buluwayo Mission. I don't like it. You ram religion down the girls' throats, as they feed geese at Strassburg."

"We do nothing of the sort. We have a prayer and a hymn before dispersing, that is all."

"So long as there is to the hymn a taking tune, and the words are void of meaning, I do not object to that. But I put my foot down upon dogma."

"I suppose you scruple to teach the alphabet?"

"No, of course not; the girls must be taught to read and write?"

"I presume there is something better than giving them the power to read the *Police News*, and that is to give them the motive to lead a good and honest life."

"Undoubtedly."

"That has its alphabet as well, I suppose."

"Of course, you must teach them to be moral."

"Without the A B C of morality?"

"I don't understand you."

"The why or the wherefore. It seems to me that we are spending millions on the educa-

tion of the masses without giving them the why and the wherefore—they should use their knowledge with a sense of responsibility."

"I don't agree with you," said Lady Emily. "Knowledge is everything."

"Controlled by a sense of responsibility," said Chris.

"I suppose that your club is insolvent," observed Lady Emily, changing the venue; "they all are."

"We have a small adverse balance. But I hope to have it made up by the kindness of a few friends."

"I do not mind giving you half a crown. I am going, however, to abolish your club, by making a clean sweep of the parts whence you derive your members."

"How so?"

"They are dens of dirt and disease. I have appealed to the London County Council about it, and I flatter myself I have influence there. My proposal is to drive a great thoroughfare through these slums and clear them clean away, and erect model lodging-houses in their place on a large scale."

"And in the meanwhile what is to become of the people of the slums?"

"They must go elsewhere."

"They have nowhere to go to. You will build your meditated blocks on the bones of the poor and destitute."

"Some must suffer. We must look to the ulterior good."

"Well, make provision in the interim. But can you get hold of the land?"

"Oh yes. It belongs to a relative of mine, one Captain Fenton. He will be only too glad to sell or lease. These model lodgings pay a good interest for money expended, and that is the main consideration with the landowners. Roger Fenton is under a cloud now. He has blundered hideously in the Transvaal. I have not been near him since his return, and have left him alone in his disgrace."

"Not even looked on him, as you passed by on the other side?"

"We have quitted our subject," said Lady Emily Driver. "Let us return to the clubs. I object to all dogma.."

"I was talking yesterday," said Chris, "to a girl in terrible temptation. She was almost starving, and her mother urged her—her mother—to the lowest depths of degradation. I told her to respect herself."

"Of course you did."

"And she said, 'Why should I?' What answer would you have made?"

"You seem to labour under strange misapprehensions," said Lady Emily irritably. "You think that there is no morality taught in the Board Schools. It is not the case, some admirable manuals of morality have been drawn up for the several standards."

"I have seen them, and they reminded me of the instruction in Ethics given by Seneca. Much his pupil, Nero, profited by it!"

"That was the fault of Nero, not of the teacher."

"The fault is that these manuals of Virtue rest on no other foundation than the opinion of the compiler, and the authority of the Board which authorises their employment. The scholars recognise no obligation to submit their wills and passions and appetites to these rules outside the school gates. As I was saying to you, I spoke yesterday with a poor destitute girl, good-looking, whom her mother was almost forcing to sink into the nethermost slime of vice. What could I say to her? That your Board School Manual, Standard III., had a veiled allusion to this sort of thing, and in a covert manner dissuaded from it? She would have replied, 'I'm no more in school, and what's the Board Manual to me?' Neither Board nor London County Council occurred at the moment to me as a basis for self-respect.

I bade her reverence herself because she was made by God in His image, for Himself, and to be happy in serving Him. I am afraid that this was dogma, so pray keep your half a crown. I suspect you will stand in need of it for the patching of the cracks which gape in your undenominational structures, reared on no solid foundations."

"Well, if you will not have it——"

"No. But I will have one thing from you, if you will give it me."

"What is that? My advice?"

"No—Captain Fenton's address."

"You shall have that, and welcome. He is in Stowell Chambers, Ormerod Place. I fear we shall never agree on fundamentals."

"I did not know that you had any fundamentals," answered Chris.

CHAPTER XXIX

ORMEROD PLACE

"Those sparks of life
That should be in a Roman you do want,
Or else you use not."

Julius Cæsar, Act i. Scene 3.

ORMEROD PLACE was one of those backwaters of life that lie north of Oxford Street and High Holborn, in which old sticks swirl about, and which they never leave, but where, when waterlogged, they sink.

It consists of houses let out in chambers, some looking north and never having the sun in at their windows; the others facing south, exposed to the sun. It is mainly tenanted by middle-aged bachelors, who are secretaries of learned societies, or are literary men in a heavy line, metaphysics and history. The under story is let out in offices to companies that possess patents which do not catch the public taste, or benevolent societies, which, though benevolent to the indigent, are benefactors to the secretaries and staff.

It was not the sort of place where would condescend to live the secretary to a missionary society who received a thousand a year, given in pence and threepenny-bits for the evangelising of the heathen, nor a controller of the County Council on the same sum, nor any of its officers down to the valuer on five hundred.

It was not the sort of place where the secretaries or any of the staff of great charitable societies would demean themselves to inhabit. Charity begins at home, and that must be a comfortable home at Norwood or in the West End.

A few of the fair sex exist there, such as are met with in the reading-room of the British Museum, and the housekeepers to the gentlemen who occupy the chambers.

No perambulators are trundled up and down the pavement. No organ-grinders ever visit the place. A cab with boxes and trunks piled on the roof, and with children's faces peering out of the windows, never draws up at one of its doors. Ormerod Place is not on the way to any terminus, and consequently is not a thoroughfare in much request. One gentleman kept a cat, which periodically had an accouchement—in fact, thrice in a twelvemonth. Before each of these interesting events the said cat perambulated the place, descended areas,

slipped in at several doors, explored strange chambers in quest of a convenient nursery, the Sunday bonnet of a housekeeper, or the pillow of a philanthropic gentleman, or the armchair of the secretary of a society for the amelioration of the condition of anything but cats.

After the event the woman who attended on the rooms of the owner of the cat visited every house up and down the place, to inquire whether there chanced to be an inmate who would take pity on a kitten.

Miss Multiplies was on the shady side of the place, and when not engaged in accumulating copy, and digesting it, coquetted at her window with a gentleman in the flat opposite, who was immersed in the study of Runes, and into whose mind the notion that he was an object of interest to his *vis-à-vis* never entered.

No, not even when this lady, with her window-sash thrown open, twittered at her piano, "Love in thine eyes ever dwells."

Why Captain Fenton had taken chambers in this dull quarter was more than he well knew himself. He had perhaps selected them because he was so seldom in town, and yet required rooms in which he could stow away his goods. On the morrow of the dinner at Lord Brendon's a hansom was driven to Stowell Chambers, and drew up at the door. From it descended Miss

Lavenham and Admiral Chandos. Lady Emily Driver had given to Chris the address of Captain Fenton in town.

In response to knocks and bell, a woman appeared at the door, grey of hair, grim of face, and in her apparel showing a tendency to slatternliness. She preceded the visitors upstairs, threw open the door, and announced them.

Captain Fenton was seated in his armchair, with his back to the door, by the fire, which was unpoked, with the daily papers on the floor unread, his pipe on the table unsmoked, and beside it a letter unopened. Christine was distressed to note his face as he turned listlessly on hearing the door opened, and visitors announced, whose names the housekeeper mispronouced and rendered unrecognisable.

Chris saw that a change had come over her friend. His face was bronzed with the African sun, but the neatness, the trimness which had been his characteristic were gone. His hair was ruffled up in a bunch over his head, his cheek was lined, and his eye sunken. He was aged ten years. When he realised who were in the room he roused wearily and bowed, with a shy expression, and without cordiality.

"Roger," said Christine, "I have brought Sir John Chandos to call on you, and I have come, of course, relying on your old friendship

—that stands. Lady Emily Driver told me yesterday at the Brendons' that she had been too busy with School Board and County Council matters to pay you a visit."

"I am very glad that you have done me the honour," said he. But his face did not express pleasure.

"Have you been to Barnford?" she asked. "I have lived in town since last November."

"Yes, I went there, but saw no one."

"Roger, Sir John Chandos has been dragged away by me before he had read his newspaper, and I know feels the deprivation. Now, may he have your *Morning Post?* He will sit in the window and study it. He is a little deaf, and will not catch our conversation, and I have plenty to say to you, and you, I am sure, to me. I brought him here because with you, and after the lesson you gave me, I have become most precise about my P's and Q's. I would not jeopardise another rupture by any indiscretion."

"Chris, do not refer to that again. A hundred times I have reproved myself for unreasonable sensitiveness on that unfortunate occasion. Say it was an indiscretion. I—I am now the victim of indiscretions much more serious. Will you sit down?"

"No, thank you," answered the girl. "Let me remain where I am."

She was leaning against the table before the fire.

"Chris," said Captain Fenton slowly and sadly, "that which you said to me last November was true; you said that I was puffed up with self-consequence over my prospects. It was so, and I behaved badly to you. But my prospects have been buried in the family vault at Fenton with my uncle, and my reputation lies on the veldt in South Africa."

"I do not in the least believe it," said she firmly.

"It is so. I am unaware what you have heard about me. I went out expecting to do great things in the Transvaal. I had confidence in myself. The first knock down I had there was over a convoy. I did send out scouts, but they were raw soldiers, as inexperienced as myself in the new conditions of warfare that meet one there. They saw nothing. I ought to have cautioned them more particularly to be on the alert. The enemy creeps up on his breast, hides behind a bush or a stone, and you no more see him than you do a mosquito. You are unaware of his presence till you hear the ping of his bullet and receive his sting. Of course the blame attaches to me, but who can teach

Tommy in a week, fresh from his barracks, to use eyes and ears like a Red Indian? I should have been equally inefficient myself had I done outpost duty. As to the other affair at Wolmersrost, I acted, as I supposed, on my instructions. How was I to know what was in contemplation to surround Botha and his force? He was enclosed on every side save one, and through that gap which I was to block he slipped away. An important movement failed through me, and I have been sent home as incompetent. I misread or misconstrued my instructions. Other officers return to be decorated and wreathed with laurels; I—crushed, and wearing a fool's cap."

"Why, Roger, it was but an unfortunate circumstance!"

"Yes, and when you were in a tight place, and were misjudged, I joined in blaming you. And now you utter no word of reprimand against me. Whereas the papers have been down on me like a load of bricks."

"But, indeed, I have a word of blame for you, Roger."

"You!" he sighed, and sank back in his armchair. "Go on then, Chris. I am prepared for anything. My shoulders are bent and bruised."

"Roger!" she said—if he had looked into

her face, he would have seen the compassion there—"Roger, you have neglected a duty to-day. Here on the table lies a letter to you from the War Office, and you ought at once to have opened it."

"Oh, I know what its contents are—another humiliation. I am to be sent to drill a lot of recruits and to teach them the goose-step."

"And if it be to teach them the goose-step, it is your duty to do so. Why, you are the man to instruct recruits, you with your experience."

Captain Fenton groaned and muttered something between his teeth.

She went on. "Fresh troops have to be sent out, and he serves his King and country every whit as well who trains the soldiers here, to profit by what he has learnt, as does he who leads them when they are sent out on active service."

"I'll look at the letter presently."

"Do your duty, Roger, even in small things. But this is not all. There is something further I have to say, and it was for the purpose of saying that I came here to day. I had promised, and must fulfil my promise. You own houses in East London. Have you ever seen them?"

"Not I. They are in an unpleasant and unsavoury locality."

"I know them, or some of them. And as Asmodeus carried the Salamanca student over Madrid, and took off the roofs of the houses to expose the interiors to his view, so will I deal with you."

He moved impatiently in his chair.

"The first roof I will remove is that of one house in an alley called Paradise Place. In this house there are six rooms, with a family in each. In one room is a poor sick woman with a baby lying on the floor—the bedstead has been sold. There are three other children, not one of whom earns a penny, and these have to be supported by the two elder sisters. One works in a factory where tin cases are made for match-boxes. She has cut her fingers, gangrene is setting in, and I fear she will lose two of them. The other sister worked at white frillings, but the Queen's death has thrown her out of employment, and the family has no bread, and will shortly be turned starving into the street, because unable to find the rent. That is the story of one room in one of your houses, Roger."

He did not speak, but folded his hands, and his fingers worked irritably.

"In another room in the same house is a

tailor, rotting away from a distressing malady, and nursed by his little boy. Thank God for putting the sense of duty into an ignorant child's heart; he tends the father, and begs, picks up from the gutter or streets the bread that sustains life in the father and him, living in an unsavoury atmosphere, as you so aptly described it. Unsavoury, Roger, but in one room in one of your houses."

"What can I do to alter this?" he asked petulantly.

"You cannot alter, but you can alleviate. We will come to that presently. In another room in the same house is a lone man, lying in bed because he cannot afford a fire. He is a man of some education, but he has sunk, I know not how. He scribbles for the Press, but only occasionally gets his work accepted. Perhaps he has received payment in gold. Then he goes to a first-class restaurant and has a three-and-sixpenny dinner and a bottle of champagne. He eats and drinks up one pound. The rest he hoards for bread and an occasional bloater, and for his rent, which will go into your pocket, Roger. But it is long since he has earned anything at all, and the leather belt is daily tightened one hole about his waist to prevent the wolf from eating through. Perhaps next week he may get something, perhaps not.

If he would write his experiences and commit to paper the tragedies that surround him, he might interest the public, but his stories concern wicked baronets and designing countesses, of whom he knows nothing. In summer he lives on the Embankment and in the parks and sleeps on the benches to save house rent. That is another denizen of one of your houses, of one room in the same house, in that unpleasant locality—to use your own expression, Roger."

"How many more of these horrible tales Chris? Your words are worse than soft-nosed bullets. What can I do? What would you desire me to do?"

"You cannot alter, that is beyond your powers, but you can mitigate the woe, woe, woe! that goes up to the ear of God from your property."

"In what manner?"

"I will tell you. This house of which I have removed the roof is rented by a little greengrocer at the corner, and he sub-lets to the poor wretches. Once a week round goes Mr. Cohen, in a black frock-coat and top hat, for the rents, and recovers, among others, those due to the greengrocer. Cohen pays over the receipts less his commission to this man who takes the entire

house, and the greengrocer pays to the clerk of your agents—what are their names?"

"Pother and Plush."

"Yes—the greengrocer has made something by the transaction, and the clerk pays what he received to Messrs. Pother and Plush, and, of course, some of his pay comes from what has passed through his hands in rent. Then your agents deduct their commission, and so a sum eventually reaches your pocket. What I would urge you to do is to sweep away some of these parasites who have their proboscis driven into the arteries of your poor tenants."

"You would not have me go round and collect my own rents?"

"No. That is impracticable. Have a single intermediary between yourself and the tenants, in place of three or four, and one who knows the people and their needs, and can be just at the same time that he is merciful."

"Who is there?"

"I can tell you, a protégé of the Admiral. But about him another time. If there be a case of great hardship, go into it yourself, Roger. Property brings obligations with it, and in this particular you have neglected yours."

Captain Fenton remained for a long time looking before him, without speaking. Chris

saw that his hands and the muscles of his face were working. After a long pause she said, "Roger, I have told you the story of three rooms in one house; there are three more under the same roof that I have removed."

"No—no more," he said, and his voice shook. "I presume that these are samples of the rest?"

"Yes, samples."

Again silence ensued.

Christine looked down in close observation on his face.

Suddenly he started up, and turning his back to the table, standing beside her, facing the fire, so that his countenance could not be read, he said, "Chris, old girl! if I failed in my duty in South Africa, I will not do so in England."

"That is right, and now, to begin, open the letter."

"No—do that, and read its contents to me."

CHAPTER XXX

REGENERATION

"I, your glass,
Will modestly discover to yourself
That of yourself which you yet know not of."
Julius Cæsar, Act i. Scene 2.

CHRISTINE took up the letter, and tore open the envelope, and read. A smile played about her lips and dimpled her cheeks. Roger saw it not, as he stood at her side brooding on his dark thoughts, looking into the dull fire. The Admiral was busy with the paper in the window, and did not look that way.

"There," said she; "read it yourself."

"No," he answered. "You read it aloud. Whither am I sent?"

"Listen.

"DEAR SIR,

"I have the honour to inform you that it has been brought to the knowledge of Lord Kitchener that the instructions forwarded to you, on which you were required to act for concentration at Wolmersrost, had fallen into the hands of the enemy, who had ingeniously falsified them, and the orders so altered were transmitted to you. Under these circumstances——

"Here follow expressions of regret that you should have been unjustly censured, and it ends with—

you will be pleased to hold yourself in readiness to rejoin the forces in South Africa. Further instructions will be forwarded to you shortly."

"What do you say to this, Roger?"

He snatched the letter from her hand, and read it through, and then, overcome by his emotion, put his arm round her waist, and drew her to him and kissed her.

"Oh! forgive me! Again the victim of circumstances. I was standing beside you."

The Admiral's nose plunged deeper into the newspaper. He was engrossed in a report of the meeting of shareholders in a company for boring for coal in Kent. He had no money in the speculation, but at this moment it was one that took hold of his attention.

He was roused by the voice of Chris, who went to him, and laying her hand on his arm, said, "Dear Sir John, we want you now, about a matter of which you know as much as myself."

"I am always at your service, Miss Lavenham, to pay attention or otherwise."

"Let us draw round the fire, and get Roger to poke it into flames, I have a tale to unfold

that will occupy a little time, and I shall need your voice in corroboration."

The Admiral smiled, rose, and drew to the hearth. He knew what the tale would be that she purposed telling.

"Now, Roger," said Chris, "you have your reputation cleared, and I am going to show you your prospects restored to sunlight. Your uncle did indeed marry. I suppose you saw the certificated copy of the marriage entry in the register. But the woman he married was already a wife. It is her son whom I have suggested that you should employ to collect your rents for you. She, poor creature, was an artist's model. She is by no means a bad woman, not so bad as you might suppose, only weak and self-indulgent and loving ease, the wife of a drunken sot of good birth."

"The son," threw in the Admiral, "of one of the finest officers who ever trod the quarter-deck."

"He is a man who, by his indolence and intemperance, dragged the family down. When she received Sir John Fenton's offer, she yielded to the temptation and closed with it, as it enabled her to shake herself free from her degrading associations, and from a struggle for life for which she was incapable. Sir John, I presume, was ashamed of what he had done,

and he settled her at Wynstead. Whether he found out the truth or whether he quarrelled with her I do not know, but a rupture of relations ensued, and he quitted her and never saw her again. However, he paid her periodically an annuity, and to show to you that the woman is not void of good feelings, I may assure you that she sent monthly a contribution to her true husband. That wretched fellow died a few days ago, in a state of intoxication, whilst attempting to cross Bishopsgate Street. He was run over by an omnibus and killed on the spot. He will be buried to-day, and the Admiral, most generously, charges himself with the funeral expenses; and the reason why we have come here this morning is that he intends to attend the burial this afternoon."

"As the son of my best friend, who was the noblest of all noble men, I could not do otherwise."

"I presume that the woman was egged on by the solicitor at Wynstead to assert her claims, on the death of Sir John Fenton, a thing she had never attempted whilst he was alive, knowing well enough that her claims were naught. I do not suppose that the lawyer was aware of the facts. She was too weak to disabuse him and tell him the truth, and she was in deadly alarm lest, now that Sir John

was dead, her annuity would cease to be paid, and she allowed to fall back into destitution and the slough of wretchedness from which she had emerged. She has been the puppet in the hands first of your uncle, and then of this Wynstead solicitor, but not an unwilling one."

"The boy," said the Admiral, "is not Sir John's, and he knew it. He is a Boutflower."

"Now," said Chris, "it remains for you quietly to establish your claim to the title and the estate of your uncle. But I ask of you a favour, though I believe I have no need to do so, as your own good feeling will prompt you to do what I propose. Continue the annuity to the woman. Her real name is Boutflower."

"A very good name," interjected the Admiral.

"It is largely through the eldest son and daughter that I have arrived at the facts. The son only recently has come to suspect how matters stand. The daughter knows nothing of them as yet. What I suggest is this, that you continue to pay the allowance to their mother, and her son and daughter will live with her. You will let Cecil, the eldest, act as your rent-collector; it will furnish him with employment and a small income. The daughter has much good in her, is capable,

and will soon find a means of earning her livelihood."

"As to the younger boy," said the Admiral, "I charge myself with his education befitting a Boutflower."

"It shall be as you desire," said Captain Fenton. "But, Chris, you overwhelm me with good news. How on earth have you contrived to find out what neither my solicitor nor that for my uncle suspected?"

"I have been, Roger, something of all sorts since November last. I have dined with lords and ladies in Belgravia, and have poured out cocoa for factory-girls in the East End. I have been beaten down with slander, and have pulled myself up again. I have been turned out of house by one aunt and taken in by another. I have been a bit of a doctor, a counsellor, an instructress, a sanitary inspector, and last, not least, an amateur detective, and that is how I got hold of the true story of the Boutflowers, and am able to restore to you your rights and your position."

"You have left out one thing from your list of all sorts in which you have been engaged," said the Admiral. "You have given me, an old bachelor, an object in life who had none before, and that is to recover to self-respect the grandson of one of the very finest and

straightest of men it has been my privilege to know."

"And," continued Chris, "I have been engaged, and then disengaged——"

"But, by George, engaged again!" exclaimed Captain Sir Roger Fenton, taking her hand. "Chris, you have this day seen me recover my reputation and my prospects, and I must have my girl restored to me as well, to make my happiness complete."

* * * * * *

"DEAR READER,

"I must admit that it was with a shock, and I cannot say with satisfaction, that I found that my friend the writer of this book, intended publishing my story in detail.

"I should have forbidden the issue, but for one consideration. Roger is back in South Africa, and is doing famously there as a brilliant officer.

"But I have no intention of being married to him till I can find a suitable girl who will take my place, and carry on my work in the Buluwayo Club. My cousin Martha will never be well again. Her health is permanently broken.

"I cannot, I dare not, desert my post and leave it unfilled. Every girl raised to a sense of the dignity of womanhood, to a love of order and good and purity, influences at least eight others. And so the good done spreads in ever-widening circles.

"How can I leave it?

"Look out next year among the Fashionable Marriages. If you do not see my name included as married to Sir Roger Fenton, Bart., then know that no one has come forward properly qualified for the post. If, however, you do see the announcement, then conclude that my place has been adequately filled.

"I remain,

"Yours truly,

"CHRISTINE."

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